# Canon Ulick Bourke:

## Cultural Nationalism, Popular Politics, and the Knock Apparition

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# Contents

# Declaration

This dissertation is my own work and has not been submitted for another degree either at University College Cork or elsewhere.

Signed _____

# Abstract

Accounts of the Knock Apparition, academic and devotional, always start by relating that the Virgin Mary, St Joseph, and St John the Evangelist appeared to fifteen people on a rainy Thursday evening at the south gable of Knock chapel, Co. Mayo, on 21 August 1879. They usually mention that the Land War was in progress. Despite the fact Knock supposedly receives one and a half million visitors a year, until three decades ago no scholar had examined accounts of the apparition. Recent work has sought to define the Knock Apparition in light of the Land War, the 'devotional revolution', which took place in Irish Catholicism in the quarter century prior to the apparition, and the influence of the parish priest, Archdeacon Bartholomew Cavanagh. This thesis acknowledges these factors, but contends that the single greatest force in shaping accounts of the apparition was Canon Ulick Joseph Bourke, one of the three priests on the commission of investigation into Knock. Furthermore, this thesis proves that Bourke's role as a central figure in influencing the later Gaelic revival has been overlooked by scholars of cultural nationalism. By examining Bourke's cultural nationalism and views on antiquity and language, as well as his politics and reaction to the Land War, this thesis argues that Bourke sought to create an orthodox version of the apparition which could be reconciled to his views on Irish Catholic identity, while serving as a bulwark against threats to the temporal power of the clergy. In addition to influencing accounts of the apparition through his role in interviewing the witnesses and recording their testimony, Bourke further shaped the narrative of the apparition by controlling its dissemination, to the extent that all accounts of Knock are based on a text largely created by him.

# Acknowledgements

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Finally, and most importantly, I would like to thank my wife Fiona whose love and support over the past years have been a constant source of encouragement and strength. This work is dedicated to her.

# List of Illustrations

# Timeline of events

*1825* – John MacHale becomes coadjutor bishop of Killala.

*1829* – Year of Catholic emancipation

*29 December* – Ulick Joseph Bourke born in Lahardane, near Castlebar, Co. Mayo to Ulick Bourke, 1777-1861, and Sisile Ní Shioradáin, 1782-1869.

*1834* – John MacHale becomes Archbishop of Tuam.

*1840* – Ulick Bourke hears Daniel O'Connell speak in Castlebar.

*1846* – Bourke commences studies at St Jarlath's College, Tuam.

*1849* – Bourke begins studies at Maynooth.

*1850* – Paul Cullen becomes Archbishop of Armagh. The Synod of Thurles begins the process or regularising Irish religious practice.

*1852* – Paul Cullen becomes Archbishop of Dublin.

Policy of independent opposition attracts support from candidates and voters but fails to create an Irish parliamentary party. Many clergy, Cullen in particular fail to condemn MPs who abandon the policy.

*1853* – Ossianic Society formed.

1854 – Bourke attends his first AGM of the Ossianic society.

Cullen succeeds in having *Propaganda Fide* impose restrictions on participation of clergy in politics.

Doctrine of the Immaculate Conception promulgated.

*1855* – Bourke elected to committee of the Ossianic Society

*1856* – Bourke publishes the *College Irish Grammar.*

*1858* – James Stephens establishes the IRB.

Ulick Bourke is ordained and becomes professor of Irish and Humanities at St Jarlath's College, Tuam.

*4 November* – Bourke commences weekly column of self-instruction in the *Nation*.

*1859 – Easy lessons or; Self-Instruction in Irish* published.

*1861– January* – Bourke subscribes to Irish Papal brigade fighting for Pope Pius IX against Italian Risorgimento.

*1863* – Bourke is made professor of Logic in St Jarlath's.

*1865* – Bourke becomes President of St Jarlath's.

*1866 – March* – Bourke one of the signatories of a resolution from Tuam Deanery which is critical of British rule but also of militant nationalism.

Paul Cullen becomes first Irish Cardinal.

*1867* – Abortive Fenian rising.

*1868* – Bourke publishes the *Bull Ineffabilis in Four Languages*.

*1869* – Bourke establishes the *Keltic Journal and Educator*.

*1870* – Bourke commences column of self-instruction in the *Teachers Journal* (until 1873).

Bourke and his nephew, John MacPhilpin, found the *Tuam News.*

Expansion of St Jarlath's.

Home Rule League founded.

*1871* – January – Bourke elected member of RIA.

*1872* – Galway election. Clergy and Fenians support John Philip Nolan. Result overturned due to clerical interference.

Bourke made Canon of Tuam Cathedral.

*1873* – John O'Connor Power persuades the Fenian Supreme council to give support to Home Rule League.

*1874* – Royal Irish Academy competition on the present state of the Irish language in Munster, Connaught, and Ulster.

John O'Connor Power elected for Mayo despite clerical objections.

*1875* – Bourke publishes *The Aryan Origins of the Gaelic Race and Language*.

*1876* – Ballinasloe Tenants Defence Association formed.

John MacEvilly elected coadjutor of Tuam.

*24 November* – David Comyn writes to Bourke to ask his advice on setting up an Irish language 'club'.

*29 December* – Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language formally established.

*1877 – 1 February* – Bourke travels to Dublin for a banquet in honour of Isaac Butt and the meeting of the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language which formulates the public announcement of its existence.

Publishes translation of O'Gallagher's Irish sermons.

*September* – Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language publishes the *First Irish book.*

*1878 – January* – Michael Davitt released from prison.

*July* – Irish recognised as exam subject at both National and Intermediate levels.

Bourke leaves St. Jarlath's and becomes Parish Priest of Claremorris.

John Devoy and Michael Davitt begin articulating New Departure.

*1879 – January* – Bourke elected onto committee of Home Rule League.

IRB Supreme council oppose New Departure.

*March and April* – Disputes around election of officers to council of Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language.

*20 April* – Monster meeting at Irishtown marks beginning of the Land War

*25 May* – 2,000 people attend tenant right demonstration in Claremorris.

*29 May* – Claremorris deanery issue resolution calling for rent reductions. This statement calls for restraint and is sympathetic to landlords.

*1 June* – Protest against Archdeacon Cavanagh held at Knock.

*7 June* – Letter from John MacHale denouncing leaders of Land War published in *Freeman's Journal.*

*20 June* – Bourke publishes letter in *Tuam News* calling for the people to be united with those in 'higher positions'.

*21 June* – P.J. Gordon tears up this copy of the *Tuam News* at protest meeting in Mayo Plains.

*24 June* – MacHale travels to Dublin to unveil a statue of John Gray. Again denounces leaders of the agitation.

*28 June* – Tenants of Charles Ormsby Blake of Claremorris publish a letter in the *Connaught Telegraph* denying they have been sworn in to secret societies.

James Daly accuses Ulick Bourke of planning to nominate a candidate, Walter Bourke, in opposition to O'Connor Power in the forthcoming election, and of attempting to keep people in bondage.

*10 July – Freemans Journal* publishes a letter from MacHale further denouncing leaders of the agitation. Tells people to be led by their priests.

*13 July* – Bourke chairs a protest meeting in Claremorris.

*July – September* – Bourke in dispute with the council of the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language regarding payment for the *Third Irish Book.*

*21 August* – Alleged apparition at Knock.

*28 August* – John MacEvilly assumes responsibilities as coadjutor of Tuam.

*31 August* – Delia Gordon said to have been cured of earache at Knock.

*8 October* – Commission of Investigation into apparition sits.

*18 October* – Charles Stewart Parnell writes to Bourke and invites him to be part of the committee of the National Land League.

*27 October* – Archdeacon Cavanagh of Knock chairs a protest meeting in Aghamore, sister parish of Knock. Bourke also on platform.

*November* – Bourke appointed to Catholic Education Committee – Body to keep Catholic schools to fore of intermediate system of education

*December* – Comyn begins plans to launch Gaelic Union.

*1880 – 5 January* – Report of subsequent apparition at Knock.

*9 January – Tuam News* publishes first account of the apparition.

*18 January* – Bourke calls for peasant proprietorship at Williamstown meeting.

*31 January* – Sister of Walter Bourke said to be cured at Knock.

*25 March – Tuam News* publishes the *Apparitions at Knock.*

*May* – Walter Bourke puts himself forward for election.

*1881 – 22 May* – Walter Bourke comes to Barnacarroll chapel armed for the first time.

*29 May* – Walter Bourke comes to chapel armed. Ulick Bourke attempts to intervene and is carried from the church by the congregation.

*June* – Ulick Bourke, Geoffrey Bourke, and Peter Geraghty approach Walter Bourke and ask him to reach agreement with his tenants.

*August* – P.J. Gordon charged with inciting people to murder Walter Bourke.

*November* – Bourke appointed examiner in Celtic to the Royal University of Ireland.

*7 November* – Archbishop MacHale dies.

*1882* – Bourke publishes MacHale biography.

Gaelic Union formally instituted as a society

*8 June* – Walter Bourke assassinated.

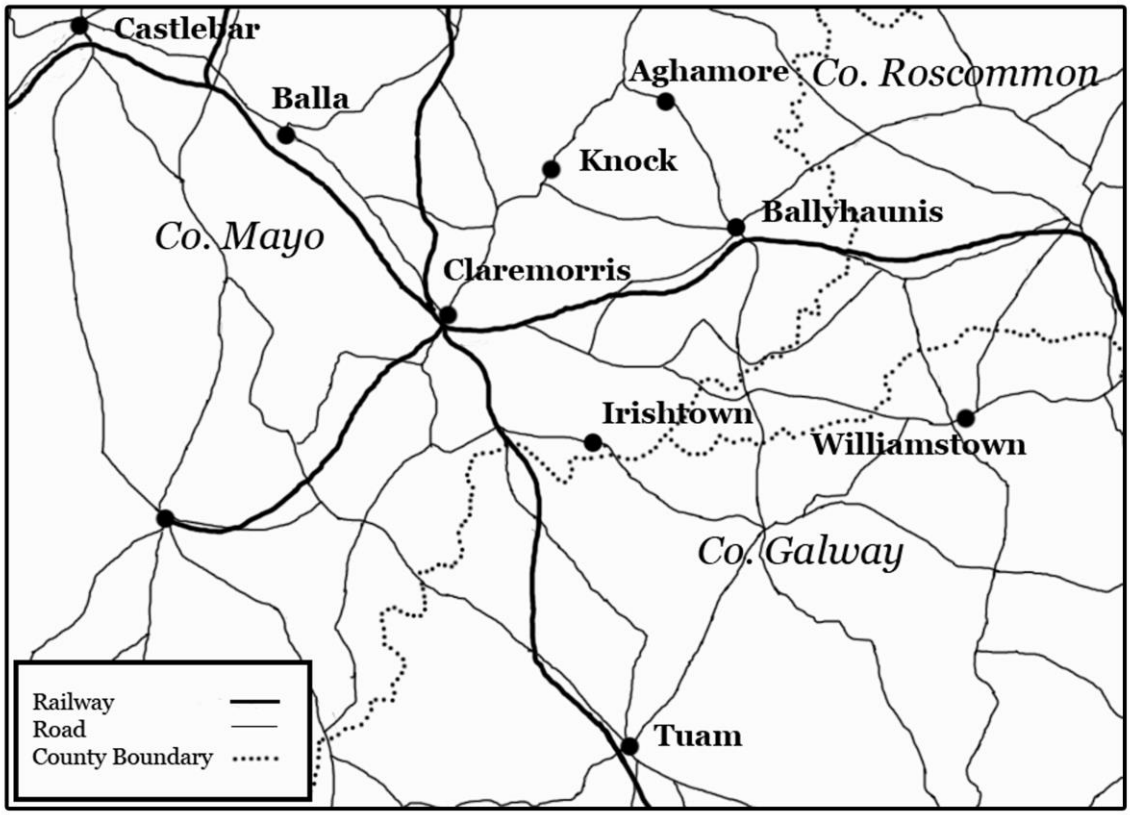
*November* – First issue of the *Gaelic Journal*

*4 December* – Bourke writes an open letter to Gladstone outlining the plight of former tenants of Walter Bourke.

*1883 – January* – Letter to Gladstone published as *A Plea for the Evicted Tenants of Mayo.*

*1887* – Publishes *Pre-Christian Ireland*.

*22 November* – Ulick Bourke dies.




**Area of Interest c. 1879:** The main sites outlined in this thesis, including sites of land meetings. The distance from Claremorris to Knock is approximately 12km, equivalent to 8 English miles or 6 Irish miles, the latter being the more common form of measurement at the time of the apparition. (Map is author's own work).

# Introduction

In December 1953 the Marian Players, an amateur dramatic society in Tuam, Co. Galway, sold out several nights at the Odeon cinema. The Legion of Mary sponsored the group and the play, written by Mrs Mai O'Brien, was titled *As Morning was Rising.* With what the *Tuam Herald* called 'painstaking attention to detail', it dramatised the alleged Marian apparition at Knock. The Archbishop of Tuam, Dr Joseph Walsh, and relatives of several of the witnesses to the apparition attended the opening night. The playwright seems to have employed considerable dramatic licence, as a young boy suffering from tuberculosis was inserted into the proceedings where none had existed. Presumably, in the play the divine intervention of the Blessed Virgin cured him, but his TB diagnosis had more to do with the anxieties of the 1950s than the occurrence of 1879. The *Tuam Herald* stated that in the role of Archdeacon Cavanagh, the parish priest of Knock, 'Mr John Nallen carried the greater weight of the play' despite his lack of experience on the stage. However a veteran of the Tuam Dramatic Society, John Cunningham, 'showed that he still has that grand feeling for the stage. His Canon Ulick Bourke, was a model of dignity, and his lines came over with the practiced ease of a veteran.'[1] Bourke, Cavanagh, and Canon James Waldron were the three priests on the commission of investigation into the apparition.

This dynamic, with Cavanagh portrayed as a central protagonist, and Bourke as an incidental character, has endured since the earliest accounts of the Knock Apparition. Although Cavanagh did not witness the apparition himself, devotional

[1] *Tuam Herald*, 19 December 1953.

writers have long emphasised a version of events where his simple piety and his devotion to the Blessed Virgin were central to the alleged apparition. This apparition of a silent and immobile Virgin Mary, St, Joseph and St John the Evangelist appeared to fifteen witnesses on a rainy evening in 1879 while a famine threatened and the Land War raged.[2] Conversely, recent scholarly studies have cast Cavanagh as someone whose opposition to the Land War drew him into conflict with his parishioners and whose role on the commission of investigation into the apparition is therefore questionable. Bourke's role on the commission, or how it related to his attitudes to the Land War, has received scant attention. The Marian Players may have felt they were staging a reconstruction, but it was more of an adaptation. The text they adapted was one Bourke largely wrote and, as the author, he is largely absent from it.

Eugene Hynes, author of *Knock: the Virgin's Apparition in Nineteenth Century Ireland*, and John White, who completed a PhD thesis on Knock in 1999, agree that the priests on the commission changed the witness testimony, yet both attempt to divine the 'meaning' of Knock from this mediated text.[3] Any attempt to interpret the apparition as either an endorsement or denunciation of the clergy is to retroactively apply attributes that may or may not have been there. The mediation of the clergy makes it next to impossible to retrieve the voices of the seers and discern what they felt about the apparition. The approaches of Hynes and White, however, are more appropriate to understanding the growth of pilgrimage at Knock. The

[2] Colm Kilcoyne, *Knock…and still they come* (Dublin, 2012); Michael Walsh, *The Apparition at Knock: A Critical Analysis of Facts and Evidence*, 3rd edn (Dublin, 2008); Catherine Rynne, *Knock: 1879-1979*, (Dublin, 1979); William Coyne, *Venerable Archdeacon Cavanagh: Pastor of Knock Shrine 1867-1897*, 2nd edn, 6th impression (Knock, 2004).

[3] Eugene Hynes, *Knock: The Virgin's Apparition in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Cork, 2008); John J. White, 'The Knock Apparitions and Pilgrimage: Popular Piety and the Irish Land War' (PhD Thesis, Boston College, 1999).

development and decline of this pilgrimage has been documented in James S. Donnelly's 1993 article 'The Marian Shrine at Knock: The First Decade.'[4] This thesis examines, not Knock as a site of pilgrimage or the apparition as an event, but Bourke's role in creating the text that enabled the development of popular devotion at Knock. The third priest on the commission, Canon Waldron of Ballyhaunis, left little in the way of evidence about his life behind. Most of what we know about Cavanagh we know as a result of his role at Knock and accounts of the apparition have influenced the image of him as a simple pious man. Yet, Ulick Bourke left behind a body of writing which expressed his outlook on a number of topics. His words and actions allow us to deduce his views on a range of issues and form a complete picture of his ideologies and priorities. Of all the figures involved in Knock, Bourke is the one for whom we can create the most complete image, and it is his thoughts and actions that most closely coincide with the shape that Knock took. When we look at Knock, we see it through Bourke's lens.

He wrote two books of instruction on the Irish language, two works of antiquarianism, an open letter to Gladstone on the land question, and a number of religious works. In addition he founded a newspaper and the first ever Irish language journal and played a crucial role in laying the bedrock of the Gaelic Revival. A short biography in Irish, *Uileoig de Búrca: Athair na hAthbheochana (Ulick Bourke: Father of the Revival)* by Pronsias Ó Maolmhuaidh, makes a heartfelt, if somewhat uncritical, argument for Bourke's importance in relation to the later Gaelic Revival, but otherwise he remains overlooked by scholars of that movement.[5] Writing in 1913 Arthur Griffith said of Bourke that 'In his circumstances and those of his time few

[4] James S. Donnelly Jr, 'The Marian Shrine of Knock: The First Decade', *Eire/Ireland*, 28, 2 (1993) pp 54-99.
[5] Prionsias Ó'Maolmhuaidh, *Uileoig de Búrca: Athair na hAthbheochana,* (Dublin, 1981).

men could have done more for the Irish language than Canon Ulick Bourke, and there are few indeed who seeing it as he saw it fading away every day around him, and despised or neglected by those to whom it was native, could have kept as robust a faith in the resurrection.'[6] Writing on his death in 1887, at the age of fifty-eight, the *Nation* said that while his career was 'in itself uneventful, it was, it must be added, very fertile to the good of the old Gaelic literature' and it rated him as worthy successor to John O'Donovan and Eugene O'Curry.[7] However not all those who wrote about Bourke gave him such praise. Writing in 1928 Edward A. D'Alton stated:

> He had spent almost all his life in St Jarlath's College. He was always a student, diligent and persistent, and had some ambition for literary distinction. But he produced nothing worthy to survive, if we except his *College Irish Grammar* and his *Easy Lessons in Irish*. These were written by one who knew Irish well; but when he wrote in English we have nothing but his *Aryan origin of the Irish Race* (sic) and a *Short Life of Dr MacHale* (sic), and these were but poorly done, and such as were not likely to bring fame.[8]

An anonymous document in the archives of the Archdiocese of Tuam, which was discovered in a diocesan property in 1930, bluntly states that he was an 'uncertain and slippery man.'[9] In essence all of these statements are correct, yet none capture the totality of Bourke's character.

The *Nation's* claim that he had an 'uneventful' career is not altogether true. Bourke joined the Ossianic Society in the 1850s and personally knew John

[6] *Tuam Herald*, 22 November 1913.
[7] *Nation*, 26 November 1887.
[8] Edward A. D'Alton, *A History of the Archdiocese of Tuam*, (2 vols, Dublin, 1928), ii, 119.
[9] Register of Priests, (Tuam Diocesan Archive, Gilmartin Papers, B1/5-ix/1).

O'Donovan. He also represents one of the only connections between the antiquarianism of the first half of the nineteenth century and the language revival of the last quarter. Through my examination of Bourke I demonstrate that, far from commencing in 1893 with the establishment of the Gaelic League, efforts for the revival of the language began in the 1870s with the establishment of the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language and, later, the Gaelic Union. Bourke had a significant influence on these two movements. When Dr Heinrich Zimmer, professor of Sanskrit and Comparative Philology at the University of Berlin, visited Dublin in 1878, in the misguided hope of improving his spoken Irish while doing archival research, he lamented the lack of enthusiasm Irish people showed for their language. He said, however, 'It affords me great pleasure, then, to observe the efforts of the gentlemen who constitute the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language, and whose united energy is accomplishing the work which Canon Bourke laboured at for nearly a quarter of a century.'[10] Chapter 1 deals with Bourke's role in the revival of the Irish language.

D'Alton's claim that Bourke's writing was poor has merit. If we judge Bourke's antiquarian works *The Aryan Origins of the Gaelic Race and Language* and *Pre-Christian Ireland* by modern academic standards, they are indeed poor. However, in Chapter 2, I argue that they give an insight into Bourke's character and ideology. According to David Carr there exists a 'distinction, long standard in the philosophy of history, between narrative and chronicle: the chronicler simply describes what happens. The narrator, by contrast, in virtue of his retrospective view, picks out the most important events, traces the causal and motivational connections

[10] *Nation,* 12 November 1878.

among them, and gives us an organised and coherent account.'[11] Bourke narrated history to a particular purpose. His nationalism influenced his views of the past and in writing on these topics he attempted to reconcile a romantic perception of Irish history with contemporary research methods. He made an impassioned plea for the equality of Ireland with other nations and strove to use the supposed ancient pedigree of the Irish nation to argue for Ireland's right to home government. Moreover, in the *Aryan Origins* in particular, Bourke attempted to use philology to argue for the validity of the Irish language, both as a spoken language and as an academic pursuit.

Bourke did indeed spend most of his life at St Jarlath's College. However, in making this claim D'Alton fails to mention that he spent thirteen years as president of the institution. He spent most of his life in religious institutions. Bourke was born on 29 December 1829, the year of Catholic emancipation. His mother was a first cousin to John MacHale, a man who was then coadjutor bishop in the diocese of Killala and who would, in 1834, became Archbishop of Tuam, a position he held until his death in 1882. MacHale had a significant reputation as a nationalist bishop and a Gaelic scholar and whether this had any impact on the direction of Bourke's life is hard to discern. Bourke was educated first at the Franciscan monastery at Errew, where his interest in the Irish language was inculcated, in particular by James Hardiman. From 1846 to 1849 he attended St, Jarlath's College Tuam, the diocesan seminary. In 1849 he commenced his studies at the national seminary in Maynooth and was ordained in 1858.

Incidents which Bourke later noted as formative events in his life included seeing Daniel O'Connell speak at Castlebar in 1840. He later reflected, 'Nothing that

[11] David Carr, *Time, Narrative and History* (Bloomington/Indianapolis, 1986), p. 59.

he has read in history, except the triumphant march of a conqueror ascending to the Capitol, presents to his mind a picture similar to that which rises before his view as he beholds O Connell coming, as it were, in triumph, amidst an exulting people, into Castlebar, or any of the great towns in which he held repeal meetings.'[12] However, not all incidents he recalled were quite so jubilant and he detailed seeing people starve during the famine:

> In April, 1847, the writer beheld a boy of about nine years reduced to the appearance of a skeleton. He came to the college, Tuam, where the writer was a student, to beg a crust of the ecclesiastical scholars, who were themselves quite as starved, and nearly as meagre, as the poor child. The hair of his head stood on end, his eyes were glaring and sunken within the sockets, which appeared overshadowed by prominent eyebrows and arched forehead; hair fully a half inch long, a false growth caused by decay, brought on by hunger covered his bare, skinny arms and cheeks.[13]

Although he recounted witnessing other people dying, it is striking that he gives the most detail in this instance. It clearly demonstrates the cloistered existence Bourke led from an early age.

In 1858 Bourke returned to St Jarlath's as professor of Irish and humanities and from 1863 was professor of logic. From 1865 to 1878 he served as president of the institution. Chapter 3 outlines Bourke's career at St Jarlath's as well as his general political views. Although a nationalist, he was a moderate. Despite the claims of some, such as his former student Mark Ryan, that he had Fenian sympathies his public pronouncements on politics always stressed moderation. At St

[12] Ulick J. Bourke, *The Life and Times of Archbishop John MacHale* (Dublin, 1882), p. 143.
[13] Ibid., p. 145.

Jarlath's Bourke emphasised the teaching of Irish and encouraged nationalist drama and performances. These public expressions of national spirit were used to present St Jarlath's as the quintessential nationalist school. This contrasted starkly with attempts to impose secular education in Ireland, which MacHale had vehemently opposed. Bourke also founded a newspaper, the *Tuam News*, in 1870 as a platform for St Jarlath's, the archdiocese, and expressions of moderate nationalism generally. Throughout his life Bourke proved particularly adept at utilising the written word to further his own agendas. As president of St Jarlath's he was part of the inner circle of the Archdiocese of Tuam and although his politics closely resembled those of MacHale, he also included some criticism in his biography of MacHale. MacHale's conflicts, first with Cardinal Paul Cullen and later with his coadjutor John MacEvilly, had a profound impact on the archdiocese, including how it was positioned to react to the Land War and the Knock apparition.

In 1878, twenty years after his ordination, Bourke left St Jarlath's and was made parish priest of Claremorris, Co. Mayo. Shortly thereafter the Land War erupted and many clergy, MacHale in particular, were quick to condemn the new movement and its leaders. Archdeacon Cavanagh, who denounced the agitation from the altar, had a massive protest directed against him. Bourke's initial response attracted the ire of James Daly of the *Connaught Telegraph* and when Bourke moved to organise a public meeting in Claremorris he was treated with suspicion bordering on hostility. Chapter 4 argues that while Bourke's distaste for radical politics and support for landlordism made him slow to support the agrarian agitation, he quickly realised that the movement had gathered significant momentum and that the failure of the clergy to support it would undermine their authority. However, his pronouncements on the land issue situated him on the more moderate side of the

movement and his association with landlords demonstrated his belief in social order. His intervention into the movement was an attempt to temper its radicalism but was crucial to bringing about the participation of the clergy in the Land War.

1879 was a significant year in Bourke's career. In January he was co-opted onto the council of the Home Rule League. Concurrent to his dispute with the leaders of the Land War, he and the other founders of the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language were involved in a conflict with that organisation's council which precipitated their departure. They then established a new organisation, the Gaelic Union. Bourke's rapprochement with the organisers of the land agitation led to Charles Stewart Parnell inviting him to join the council of the Land League when it was formed in October and in November he was appointed to the Catholic Education Committee, a body which had been established to keep Catholic schools to the fore of the intermediate system of education. Meanwhile, significant change commenced in the Archdiocese of Tuam as John MacEvilly took his position as MacHale's coadjutor bishop at the end of August.

After the apparition at Knock took place on 21 August 1879 Bourke was one of three priests on a commission of investigation appointed by Archbishop MacHale, as detailed in Chapter 5. The commission never carried out any investigation beyond taking the unsworn testimony of fifteen witnesses, and although it supposedly reported to the archbishop no report was ever sent to the Vatican. However, devotees of Knock see the testimony of the commission as proof of the reality of the apparition. Bourke's role on the commission involved recording the testimony. However, I argue that not only was the process of investigation flawed, but Bourke's own agendas and ideology shaped the form the testimony took. Bourke worked to conflate Irish and Catholic identity and his fear of secularism and the destruction of

the social order had led him to oppose the Land War. Moreover, his writing demonstrated his ability to make selective use of evidence to construct narratives. When the witnesses were interviewed, they believed they had seen something; from their words Bourke worked to create a cohesive version of the event. The collective memory of Knock is therefore a textually mediated collective memory. As Bourke was author of this text this thesis proposes to examine not just other texts he created but his views on politics, culture, religion and identity.

Chapter 6 demonstrates his agenda in promoting Knock by focusing on the manner in which Bourke disseminated the narrative of the apparition. The *Tuam News* published the first newspaper accounts and his nephew, John MacPhilpin, edited a book, *The Apparitions at Knock,* which, I argue, Bourke largely wrote.[14] It reproduced altered versions of the witness testimony and insisted on the credibility of the apparition. In addition, Bourke wrote to other publications and met with journalists, whom he escorted to Knock in order to ensure they received an orthodox version of events. Bourke, with history, language and the Land War, demonstrated that he could take what was organic and attempt to impose his own shape on it. I argue that a similar process took place at Knock. Spurred on by the threat to the social power of the clergy, Bourke worked to encourage devotion and preserve order. Furthermore, I argue that accounts of the apparition are in fact based on a narrative that Bourke created and disseminated.

Bourke's actions must be seen in light of his own particular perception of national identity. Joep Leerson has stated that when tracing the origins of nationalist thought and ideas we cannot always follow a linear path. Instead he compares

[14] John MacPhilpin (ed.), *Apparitions at Knock*, unnumbered 1894 edition, (Dublin, 1894).

nationalism to a mushroom, the largest part of which remains underground. All the toadstools in the forest, Leerson says, while appearing to be separate organisms, actually all stem from the same mycelium, a large underground fungus, which sporadically sends up shoots that appear in a familiar mushroom form. For Leerson, this can be seen across Europe as similar phenomena manifest themselves in a seemingly unrelated manner in different countries or national movements.[15] The same can apply to nationalist thought in one country: while a nationalist narrative may portray a clear unbroken line, the actual path can prove harder to trace. By examining the Knock apparition through Bourke's role in it, it appears not as an isolated incident but one of the shoots from the mycelium of his form of cultural nationalism, a form influenced by Catholicism and political moderation. As such, the collective memory of Knock is not based on the accounts of fifteen separate witnesses, but on the prejudices and ideology of one priest.

[15] Joep Leerson, 'Irish Laws, Irish Ways and Irish Philology: Cultural Continuity in 19th-Century Ireland.' *Breac: A Digital Journal of Irish Studies,* (2014) [cited 2015,03,17] https://vimeo.com/88059085.

# Chapter 1: Saving the Soul of the Nation – The Beginning of the Irish Language Movement

In 1874 and 1876 the Royal Irish Academy held a competition for essays on the state of the Irish language in Ulster, Munster and Connaught. John Fleming, a teacher in Rathcormac National School, County Cork, claimed to be the only teacher in Munster teaching Irish and won a prize for his 1874 essay. Francis Keane won prizes for essays on Munster (1874) and Ulster (1876) and Ulick Bourke won a prize for his essay on the state of the Irish language in Connaught (1874). These four essays have in common the bleak picture they paint of the state of the Irish language in the 1870s. Irish was in decline as a spoken language and little was being done to preserve or revive it. Printed texts in Irish were scarce and even if a person had an inclination to learn Irish they had little opportunity to do so. All three writers portrayed a language on its way to extinction. Not only was spoken Irish disappearing, but so too were associated traditions such as keening, poetry and songs and the writing of letters. Ulick Bourke was the only one of the three writers who had received many letters in Irish, due to his profile in promoting the language. Francis Keane linked the decline to population loss as a result of the famine and subsequent emigration and 'the introduction of the National Schools into Ireland, from which every vestige of Irish has been excluded'.[1] Bourke's contribution was typically prolix and tangential, but, as with much of his writing on language, amidst the hyperbole and digression he made perceptive points. He portrayed a state of affairs whereby English rule, be it through the penal laws of former times or the

[1] Francis Keane, 'Essay on the present state of the Irish language and literature in Munster' (Royal Irish Academy MS 12 Q 13).

national school system, had worked to undermine the Irish language, and Irish speakers, in their desire to provide their children with opportunities, had become collaborators in this decline. Bourke did not propose that Irish people should abandon English and return to only speaking Irish. Instead he suggested that both languages could exist side by side and highlighted countries where bilingualism was the norm. However, while he accepted that English would not be dislodged from Irish society he stressed the importance of learning Irish, reinforcing his previously stated belief that 'No nation supposes her sons and daughters to be educated who have not learned their mother tongue.'[2] He called Irish 'the language of our fathers, of our race, of St Patrick, of the saints and sages who for fourteen hundred years have flourished on this island'. Typical of Bourke, he linked the Irish language, the Christian faith and the essence of nationhood. As well as stating the philological pedigree of the Irish language, he said: 'The fact is however that the language is a beautiful language', unlike 'that mongrel of a hundred breeds called English'. Bourke proposed a number of measures to prevent the loss of Irish as a spoken language, including the preservation of Gaelic texts; the creation of a popular literature; teaching Irish in schools; prizes for essays; the publication of cheap grammars, dictionaries and text books; holding debates in Irish; and organising conferences.[3] Religion too could play a role if the clergy embraced preaching and instruction of the catechism in Irish.

This chapter demonstrates that Bourke actively strove towards these goals throughout his life and, moreover, they were a crucial influence on others who worked, during and after his life, to preserve and promote the Irish language. Irish

[2] Ulick Bourke, *The College Irish Grammar* (Dublin, 1856) p. vii.
[3] Ulick Bourke, 'Essay on the present State of the Irish language and literature in Connacht' (RIA MS 12 Q 13).

may not be universally spoken today but, far from being extinct, it enjoys considerable support from the state as well as cultural organisations. Many of the measures which arrested the decline of the language were first proposed by Bourke. I argue that Bourke worked as a cultural agent active in shaping Irish identity and brought his ideology to bear on national consciousness, directly and indirectly. Moreover, I show that at the time of the Knock apparition a movement had begun for the revival of the Irish language. It enjoyed a reasonable amount of success and the application of Bourke's ideas was central. Furthermore, by the time Ulick Bourke sat on the commission of investigation into Knock he was involved in a dispute with certain revivalists. While he may have been emboldened by the effect his ideas could have on shaping Irish identity, he would also have seen the need to continue to influence events in the face of his challengers. In 1879 the growth of a language movement, an explosion of agrarian agitation and the Marian Apparition at Knock indicate a social, cultural, religious and political confidence that had not been witnessed for decades. Ulick Bourke played a role in shaping the direction of these events and a very particular vision of the nature of the Irish nation underpinned his actions.

In his 1981 biography of Bourke, Pronsias Ó'Maolmhuaidh was keen to identify him as the 'father of the revival'.[4] This claim has merit but its justification also exposes its flaws. Ó'Maolmhuaidh pointed out that there exists a seeming wilful ignorance about efforts to revive the Irish language before the formation of the Gaelic League in 1893 and as a result Bourke's efforts have been overlooked. However, to give sole credit to Bourke for earlier attempts at revival would do disservice to the efforts of others — such as his cousin Archbishop John MacHale —

[4] Ó'Maolmhuaidh, *Uileoig de Búrca*.

to keep the language alive. Bourke did, however, play a crucial role in encouraging the use of Irish in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, at a time when it was in decline and without many visible supporters. Furthermore, he played a pivotal role in the establishment of the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language and the Gaelic Union and was an important influence on the ideologies and actions of these organisations, the Gaelic Union in particular. Although commonly misrepresented, the work of these organisations was the bedrock of the language revival and the Gaelic Union was the direct predecessor of the Gaelic League. Many leaders of the later Gaelic revival first became active in the language movement through the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language or the Gaelic Union and learned the language through their classes and publications. Bourke showed his most pragmatic side when dealing with the issue of the teaching of Irish. In his writing, when he turned his attention from some of his more farfetched antiquarian theories, he made some solid suggestions regarding the Irish language, the reasons for its decline and possibilities for its renewal.

In his 1875 work *The Aryan Origins of the Gaelic Race and Language* he expanded on the reasons for the linguistic decline outlined in his 1874 essay. These included the destruction of manuscripts by the Danes, the Statutes of Kilkenny forbidding every person of English or Norman extraction from using the language, the inability of Irish-speaking people to obtain patronage in the Church of England in its early days, and the penal laws. However, he did not lay all blame at the door of the English. Bourke felt that opportunities for progress were barred to those speaking Irish and parents, for this reason, were complicit in preventing their children being taught Irish, even when they themselves were Irish speakers with a poor grasp of English. Bourke believed the exclusion of Irish from national schools was a factor as

was the failure of the Catholic clergy to promote or even speak the language, owing in part to the fact that it was poorly taught in Maynooth. In higher education Bourke felt that both Trinity College and the Catholic University neglected to help the language. He assigned blame to all levels of Irish society; ordinary Irish people felt a shame of the language, while at an academic level antiquarians did not encourage its use as a living language but rather sought to preserve it like a mummy.[5] As early as 1856 Bourke stated: 'government besides, is not illiberal in the patronage it has extended to Irish literature. The age of persecution too has passed. The children of Ireland are no longer — as of old, flogged for lisping in the broad Celtic of their fathers.'[6] Whatever the historic role of the British government in suppressing the Irish language, he felt the onus now lay on the Irish people to revive it.

## *The College Irish Grammar*

Bourke's first public act promoting the Irish language was the publication of the *College Irish Grammar* in 1856, two years before his ordination. According to Bourke: 'The first motive that induced me to write an Irish grammar, was to supply a want that my fellow students in Maynooth have laboured under. They, and all who have studied there, know how much a work of this kind was required.'[7] He also hoped this work would benefit students of the Catholic University as Bourke believed previous grammars had been of little use except to those who already spoke Irish. Thus, he claimed to have simplified the language and based his grammar on Connaught Irish, not because it was the superior form, but because he had the

5 Ulick Bourke, *The Aryan Origins of the Gaelic Race and Language,* 2nd edn (London, 1876), pp 32-76.
6 Bourke, *College Irish Grammar*, p. viii.
7 Ibid., p. v.

greatest familiarity with it. The *Grammar* also included a list of subscribers, which showed that several hundred copies were ordered prior to publication. A large number of these subscribers were clergy, indicating that Bourke had a well-established network of supporters, and the *Grammar* went on to sell several thousand copies over the course of several editions. Bourke's grammar was not as large as John O'Donovan's landmark work, which had appeared twelve years earlier, but it was Bourke's intention that it be more accessible and affordable.[8] Its accessibility is debatable as he found it hard to stay on topic and tended to digress into the discussion of philology, a subject he had a particular fondness for (dealt with in greater detail in the next chapter). The merits of the *Grammar* were later widely debated and, while it was very popular, it had its share of detractors. The comparable accessibility of the *First Irish Book*, published by the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language in 1877, but largely based on Bourke's work, led to criticism of Bourke's works of language instruction.[9] In responding to this, David Comyn, editor of the *First Irish Book*, was circumspect but loyal and stated that Bourke's treatment of linguistic themes made his work more useful to those with an interest in 'comparative philology' than to the 'mere student', while conceding that it suffered from a want of 'method and arrangement'.[10] This was not, however, the first time Bourke's work had come in for criticism. John Fleming's 1874 essay went so far as to claim that positive reviews of the work encouraged young students to begin their studies with it, but the *Grammar's* inaccessibility often led to them abandoning their attempts to learn the language.[11] In order to defend this opinion Fleming attached a

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[8] Ibid., p. xiii.
[9] David Comyn to John J. Doyle, 14 October 1877 (Comyn Papers NLI MS 8466(5)).
[10] Ibid.
[11] John Fleming, 'Essay on the present state of the Irish language and literature in Munster' (RIA MS 12 Q 13).

detailed appendix to the essay highlighting differences between Bourke's and O'Donovan's grammars and showing that where differences arose the mistake was, invariably, Bourke's. Disagreement between Bourke and Fleming extended back to 1871 when Fleming criticised Bourke for using grammar influenced by Scots Gaelic. Writing in response in the *Teacher's Journal*, Bourke administered what Fleming felt was a 'lashing'. In 1878 Fleming was preparing an edition of O'Donovan's grammar for the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language and in private correspondence remained critical of aspects of Bourke's work.[12] Bourke, in his own essay on the Irish language in Connaught, claimed that his grammar was the only one in widespread use and said of O'Donovan's that, while it was of a very high quality, 'its high price and its discursive character on ancient and modern Irish prevents its spread amongst the generality of Irish students'.[13]

Once other works of instruction came on the market shortcomings in Bourke's texts became obvious, but for twenty years they represented the most accessible route to learning Irish. With limited classes available, for people not born into Irish-speaking households, they provided one of the few opportunities to come to terms with the language. Writing in 1913 Arthur Griffith stated that between 1860 and 1880 the bulk of those who learned Irish learned it from Bourke's books.[14] As Bourke could rarely put pen to paper without indulging his own opinions on any number of topics, they absorbed not only the language but also Bourke's thoughts on it and how it could be promoted and preserved. He was apt to wander and bring in his other theories, not only about ancient history, but about the necessary steps for Ireland to be an equal to the nations of the world. Comyn's loyalty to Bourke was

[12] John Fleming to David Comyn, 4 June 1878 (NLI MS 8467(9)).
[13] Bourke, 'Essay on the present state of the Irish language and literature in Connacht' (RIA MS 12 Q 13).
[14] *Tuam Herald*, 22 November 1913.

not ill placed; it was a recognition of his contribution.

### *Easy Lessons or; Self Instruction in Irish*

Commencing on 4 August 1858 Bourke published a weekly column of self-instruction in Irish in the *Nation*, which ran for a number of months. Showing a commitment to the Irish language that the *Nation* had lacked since its inception in 1842, the paper dedicated between a half and a full page to the Irish language each week. As well as lessons and exercises from Bourke, it published poetry in Irish and the column met with a favourable response. The lessons in the *Nation* were printed with the statement that the author reserved the right to re-publish them and in 1859 they were collected into *Easy Lessons or Self Instruction in Irish*. These lessons provided entry-level instruction in the language and the book form improved on the newspaper articles. Here, once again, it is possible to see the dichotomy between the practical, if prolix, exponent of the living language and the pseudo-scientific antiquarian. Bourke justified digressions into his particular concepts of science and philosophy by stating:

> It may be objected that in *Easy Lessons*, philosophic deductions from the general and special principles of language are unnecessarily introduced. Those who would so object should bear mind that nothing, no matter how simple, can to a learner appear easy unless he knows the principles on which its *objective truth* [emphasis mine] is founded. In order therefore to know whatever we learn, it is necessary to be acquainted with the philosophic truths from which such knowledge is derived.

Bourke considered it problematic that ‘most works on Irish have been written with

little or no attention to the philosophy and genius of the language'.[15]

The ready market that existed for this work was demonstrated by the fact that by 1867 it was in its fifth edition and had sold 4,000 copies. In the preface to the fifth edition Bourke stated that 'some ten years ago written Irish had been nigh reckoned a thing of the past. Not so to-day; it is written, as well as read and spoken, by thousands of the growing youth—young men and maidens—in many parishes throughout Connaught.' This was a much more optimistic outlook than the one he would give in his 1874 essay and he claimed that not only was Irish gaining in popularity in Ireland but that the *Easy Lessons* had found their way to 'the ends of the earth' and were prized in German and English universities.[16] Bourke believed that foreign scholars prized Irish more highly than did Irish people and he pointed to a number of academics across Europe engaged in studying the language. He diagnosed the apathy towards the Irish language as connected with Irish material poverty and a desire for social and economic advancement. He stated: 'Away with that horrible materialism which measures greatness by the standard of money, or that of private advantage, and which asks: "What good is Gaelic to me? What shall I gain by it? Where will it carry me to if I leave the Irish shore?"'[17] This statement could be construed as having religious symbolism, invoking as it does the gospel of Mark: 'For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?'[18] If the Irish language was the soul of the Irish nation, Bourke sought its salvation. He attached a great deal of importance to his books and claimed:

> In any case should (Irish), after the lapse of another century, or half century, perish, the "Lessons" now edited, and the "College Irish Grammar," with the

[15] Ulick Bourke, *Easy Lessons: or, Self-Instruction in Irish*, 5th edn (Dublin, 1867), pp iii-iv.
[16] Ibid., p. v.
[17] Ibid., p. vi.
[18] Gospel of Mark, King James Version, 8:36.

> new dictionary published in the pages of the Nation, will save much of the wreck of that stately ship in which our race for more than three thousand years sailed on the waves of time in safety and security.[19]

## The Irish Language in Newspapers and Periodicals

Bourke continued this association with media throughout his life and, in 1869, he established a short-lived journal, the *Keltic Journal and Educator* and, in 1870, a newspaper, the *Tuam News*, which remained in print until 1908. Bourke was a man who embraced the printed word and sought to promote the Irish language not simply as an antiquarian or philological pursuit (though assured of its merits in that regard), but as a language with its own contemporary literature and press. The appearance of the *Keltic Journal and Educator,* produced by Bourke and printed in Manchester in 1869, is significant as it was the first periodical dedicated to the Irish language. It was not so much concerned with legend or prose but with providing a series of Irish lessons. Ambitious in scope, in its first number Bourke proclaimed:

> This Linguistic Journal is intended to be a medium of intellectual culture for Keltic students in England, Ireland, Scotland, America, Australia, the Colonies, and throughout Europe; a vehicle for interchange of thought and literary views amongst scholars who wish to support the Keltic tongue. It is designed chiefly for the intelligent and studious working classes, yet suited fully, we trust to the learned,—for the purpose of leading all who wish to acquire a knowledge of Keltic, by a smooth and pleasant path to the summit of their hopes—-a perfect mastery of the grand old Keltic tongue.[20]

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[19] Bourke, *Easy Lessons*, p. vi.
[20] *Keltic Journal and Educator*, no. 1.

The orientation towards the working classes is surprising as it is the only time Bourke mentions class in any of his works and he had an aversion to class-based politics (addressed in Chapters 3 and 4). The price of the journal, at one and a half pence per issue, made it affordable to this audience. By marketing the magazine to the diaspora, he clearly associated language with Irish identity and encouraged emigrants to use it as an identifier in those Anglophone countries where they settled. The attempt at a broad appeal was coupled with criticism of antiquarians who did little for the living language, yet were 'very fond of the language of Ireland, as it was spoken in the sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries'.[21] Bourke claimed that they treated Irish as if it was dead and that only if modern Irish ceased to exist as a spoken language would they value it as highly as they did the language of the eighth century. Bourke further stated that had an organ such as the *Keltic Journal* been available fifty or even thirty years earlier the Irish language would be in as healthy a state as Welsh. While the vast majority of the eight pages of the journal, which ran for seven editions in 1869, dealt with practical lessons, there was of course an editorial and, as ever, Bourke digressed into his own interpretations of antiquarianism and philology, all delivered in a typically hyperbolic style. The lessons, however, were succinct and accessible, although they sometimes combined language and religion by using excerpts from the Gospel according to John as pedagogic devices. As ever, the tongue of the Gael and the word of God were to be conjoined.

In keeping with his desire to promote Irish as a modern accessible language Bourke used a letter style of his own invention, which he called Romano-Keltic, and published letters from correspondents commending this initiative.[22] He also

[21] *Keltic Journal and Educator*, no. 2.
[22] See Appendix; 'Irish' versus 'Roman' letters.

reproduced an article from a French journal, *Revue Archéologique*, praising the publication. Bourke enjoyed having his contributions recognised and, despite his criticism of those who studied Irish merely as an academic pursuit, always sought to encourage its study abroad. As with exhorting the diaspora in Anglophone countries to speak Irish, its study by foreign academics enhanced not just the profile of the language but of the nation. The author of the French article recommended the *Keltic Journal* for foreigners who sought to learn Irish but warned: 'I believe it will be stranded through Irish indifference. The Irish have made a sacrifice of their language.' However, the author offered fulsome praise for the efforts of Archbishop MacHale and Canon Bourke and stated that the language could be saved if the efforts made in Tuam were replicated elsewhere.[23] Bourke offered encouragement by way of a £5 prize for the best eight-page article in Irish.[24] The publication itself cannot have enjoyed much commercial success: despite Bourke's claim that he printed 4,000 copies, the published list of subscribers was extremely short and the space given over to advertising never included much beyond advertisements for Bourke's own books and for the journal itself. The *Keltic Journal* only ran to seven issues but was remarkable as a genuine attempt to provide accessible and affordable instruction in Irish to a wide audience.

Bourke published a column of instruction in Irish in the *Teachers Journal* from 1870 to 1873, which ran along similar lines to his column in the *Nation*. This platform must have been a great boon for Bourke's attempts to encourage the teaching of Irish but it is impossible to know how many teachers found guidance in these pages or how they put the advice into practice when the teaching of Irish was

[23] *Keltic Journal and Educator*, no.3.
[24] *Keltic Journal and Educator*, no.4.

officially sanctioned in 1878. Bourke was more intimately involved with the publication of the *Tuam News*. It launched in 1870 with Bourke's nephew John MacPhilpin as editor. The politics and role of the *Tuam News* are discussed in greater detail in chapter 3 but it, too, had a role in Irish instruction. MacPhilpin was a very capable journalist and editor and the *Tuam News* was of as high a quality as any other local or regional publication of the time. In journalistic quality it could arguably rival many of its contemporary national publications. In 1873 the paper commenced a 'Gaelic language department,' which originally consisted of Irish language lessons from Bourke, continuing a tradition he had begun in other publications. Eventually, control of this section passed to John Glynn, a former teacher at St Jarlath's, and it featured contributions from many notable language activists. These included the earliest published writings by Fr Eugene O'Growney, whose *Simple Lessons in Irish* would prove central to the learning of Irish in the period of the Gaelic revival.[25] It was unusual that a newspaper Bourke helped to found existed for three years before publishing in the Irish language, but when it did it used Bourke's Romano-Keltic letters.

## Dictionary

Bourke's great, and unrealised, ambition was to complete an Irish-English dictionary. The dictionaries that existed in the nineteenth century were generally considered inadequate. The essays produced by Bourke, John Fleming and Francis Keane for the Royal Irish Academy listed dictionaries in use and agreed that not only did these dictionaries have shortcomings, they were also scarce and expensive where

[25] Timothy G. McMahon, *Grand Opportunity: The Gaelic Revival and Irish Society, 1893-1910* (Syracuse, 2008), pp 9-34.

available.[26] As late as 1885 Bourke was still contemplating his dictionary and had enlisted the help of John Glynn, editor of the Irish language department in the *Tuam News,* to assist him, claiming he had already made twenty attempts to compose a school dictionary.[27] His continued desire to produce the work was coupled with a desire to help Glynn. Bourke had first employed Glynn as a teacher in the early 1870s and the relationship seems at first to have been frosty. At the very least Bourke clearly asserted his authority, imposing on Glynn to carry out additional tasks such as measuring the size of fields belonging to the College and writing a vocabulary for his translation of *O'Gallagher's Sermons*.[28] The latter was in many ways a mini-dictionary and, along with a dictionary that appeared briefly in the *Nation,* it was the closest Bourke came to realising his ambition, even if Glynn carried out much or even all of the work. By the early to mid-1880s Bourke was favourably disposed towards Glynn and wrote him letters of reference and contacted acquaintances in the hope of procuring him paid work. When he had no reply from these parties he proposed to employ Glynn in a last effort to produce a dictionary, stating: 'It has been now 20 years my wish to write and publish a school Irish dictionary. I have attempted some of it. What has kept it back is – press and other duties and fear of great loss of money.'[29] Bourke proposed that for one pound a week Glynn could work on the dictionary for a few hours a day and, as well as writing the Irish language section for the *Tuam News,* he could work as a freelance reporter for the *Freeman's Journal* and the *Irish Times.* This was, apparently, not quite satisfactory to Glynn. On 14 September 1885 Bourke wrote and informed him that

[26] Bourke, 'Essay on the present state of the Irish language and literature in Connacht'; Keane 'Essay on the present state of the Irish language and literature in Ulster'; Fleming, 'Essay on the present state of the Irish language and literature in Munster' (RIA MS 12 Q 13).
[27] Ulick Bourke to John Glynn, 5 September 1885 (NLI, Glynn notebooks, MS 3254).
[28] Glynn notebook 1 (NLI, Glynn notebooks, MS 3254).
[29] Bourke to Glynn, 24 August 1885 (NLI, Glynn notebooks, MS 3254).

he was right to look after his mother and brother and now offered three pounds a week.[30] This was a significant amount of money for a parish priest to have at his disposal and is over three times the amount Glynn was paid as a teacher of Irish and mathematics at St Jarlath's in the 1870s. It indicates the high value Bourke placed on Glynn's work as well as posing questions about Bourke's own finances. Regardless, the dictionary never came to fruition.

## Religious Works

> According to John Fleming in 1874:
>
> The printed books most extensively used in Munster are Dr O'Reilly's Irish Catechism; the "Pious Miscellany" of Timothy Sullivan, O'Gallagher's Sermons and Donlevy's Catechism. One at least of these to be found with every Roman Catholic who can read Irish; as is the Irish Bible, or some portion of it, with every
>
> Irish reading Protestant: and many of these have the Book of Common Prayer also.[31]

The prevalence of religious material in the Irish language was one that Bourke and Keane echoed in their essays and, as the list above demonstrates, it was common to Catholics and Protestants alike. The proselytising Irish Church Mission Society used Irish widely, possibly because it gave them access to the poorest and most vulnerable in Irish society. Thus, while religious writing dominated print material in Irish, it was not exclusively Catholic. It would be somewhat surprising then if Ulick Bourke, the principal proponent of the Irish language in the third quarter of the nineteenth

[30] Bourke to Glynn, 14 September 1885 (NLI, Glynn notebooks, MS3254).
[31] Fleming, 'Essay on the present state of the Irish language and literature in Munster' (RIA MS 12 Q 13).

century, and a Catholic priest, had not produced religious works.

The two most significant were both translations. In the context of Bourke's role in Knock of particular significance is *The Bull "Ineffabilis" in Four Languages or, the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary Defined.* Pope Pius IX had requested the translation of an 1854 papal bull on the Immaculate Conception into all languages and Bourke's version contained Irish as well as English, Latin and French. The four versions were published in columns alongside each other across two pages. The Irish language was still printed in an old 'Gaelic' font, marking the last time Bourke used these letters before moving on to his preferred Romano-Keltic script. The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, which states the Virgin Mary was conceived without sin, underlines the centrality of Mary to the Catholic faith and Bourke's introduction reinforced the greatness of Mary. This played no small role in encouraging devotion to the Virgin in the latter half of the nineteenth century, a devotion which would manifest itself in numerous Marian apparitions throughout Europe, Knock included. Bourke's *Bull "Ineffabilis"* was widely advertised in newspapers throughout the 1870s, ensuring that by the time of the Knock apparition he was already synonymous with Marian devotion. A prayer, by Bourke, devoted to the Virgin prefaced the book and a poem by MacHale dedicated to the same figure featured in the latter half of the work. It also included an essay in which Bourke reflected on the art of illumination and the role of Irish monks in it.

Bourke's other major work of religious translation, *Sermons in Irish-Gaelic by the most Rev. James O'Gallagher, Bishop of Raphoe*, approached Catholicism from a more Gaelic angle. It provided an idiomatic English translation and vocabulary list for the Irish language sermons of the eighteenth century Bishop of Raphoe, James O'Gallagher. The *Tuam News* printed the first edition, which

appeared in 1877, but it listed MH Gill and Son as publisher. Bourke received substantial financial support in this venture from Daniel MacGettigan, Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland, who told Bourke: 'No tongue can tell what a blessing you have secured for the children of St Patrick, by your energy and zeal in bringing out the *Sermons* in such beautiful style.'[32] In producing this work Bourke was cognisant of its use as an aid to learning Irish.[33] The book also featured a brief memoir of O'Gallagher's life and, while Bourke admitted that very little was known on the subject, he maintained that adequate materials existed to construct a memoir. Bourke's narrative, however, engaged very little with the life of his subject. It did find space for discussion on the origins of the Irish people, the history of the church in Ireland, Irish and English history, succession and nobility and other themes that only had the most tenuous of connections to his supposed subject. Bourke felt it significant that O'Gallagher's life corresponded with the period of the penal laws and represented him as an individual who was persecuted as a cleric and as an Irish speaker and whose adhesion to both his faith and language distinguished him as a patriotic figure. [34] Bourke maintained that 'biography is history presented in the life of an individual' but if O'Gallagher could have read this biography he may have been surprised at how much history it contained compared to the few details pertaining to his own life. When Bourke turned to the events of O'Gallagher's life, he stated: 'He loved his own dear Donegal,—her people, their religion.—Why should he not be a soldier of Christ, and a teacher of the glorious faith which so many princes and prelates had practiced?'[35] The O'Gallagher Bourke presented is

[32] Ulick Bourke, *Sermons in Irish-Gaelic by the most Rev. James O'Gallagher, Bishop of Raphoe, with literal idiomatic English translation on opposite pages, and Irish-Gaelic Vocabulary; also a memoir of the Bishop and his times*, 2nd edn (Dublin 1878).
[33] Ibid., p. v.
[34] Ibid., p. xx.
[35] Ibid., p. xxix.

not a real but symbolic; a representation of a Catholic and Gaelic-speaking Irish man whose dedication and propriety withstood oppression and whose use of the Gaelic language and Catholic faith set him apart from invaders and oppressors. In bringing out this translation of a work already known to readers of Irish, Bourke retrieved O'Gallagher for the wider population and attempted to establish him as a national role model, while simultaneously encouraging interest in the Irish language.

## The Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language and the Gaelic Union

While Bourke wrote widely on and in the Irish language from the 1850s this had, in many ways, been a solitary pursuit. From the 1870s onwards, however, his work would influence the future of the Irish language. The formation of the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language in 1876 marked a watershed in Irish cultural nationalism. It was the first organisation in at least seventy years to concern itself with the Irish language, not as a tool of antiquarian investigation, but as a living language. It followed ideas Bourke had set down in the previous decades and produced affordable books of instruction that aimed to encourage the teaching and speaking of Irish. Moreover, through the figure of Bourke, a direct line can be drawn from the expression of cultural nationalism in earlier antiquarian forms to the later cultural revival.

Ulick Bourke, the Gaelic Union, and the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language, and their relationship to earlier forms of cultural nationalism as expressed through antiquarianism, have been almost completely neglected by scholars of the Gaelic Revival. While Kevin Collins' *Catholic Churchmen and the Celtic Revival 1848 – 1916* examines the relationship of Catholic clergy to the Irish

language, the scope of his study means it is not so much about revival as about the relationship of individual clerics to the language. Unlike the writers outlined below, Collins acknowledges the importance of the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language takes it as the starting point of the formation of movements which brought 'Celtic Revivalism to the forefront of Irish life.' However, he deals with Bourke, the Gaelic Union and the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language over four pages based entirely on secondary sources and repeats a number of erroneous assertions, such as claiming Bourke had Fenian sympathies.[36]

Nicholas Wolf's *State, Religion, Community, and the Linguistic Landscape in Ireland, 1770 – 1870* attempts to investigate the use of the Irish language in the pre-revival period and its relationship to state and church power but, in ending his study at 1870, he in no way addresses Bourke or the organisations in which he was involved. Crucially, Wolf neglects the published works of Bourke which appeared inside the timeframe of his study. Wolf makes claims about how widespread Irish was and maintains that the narrative of decline and revival was one that was developed later. This assertion however is called into question by the RIA essays of 1874 and 1876 which portray a language which was in steady decline. While he briefly mentions the Gaelic Union and the Society for the preservation of the Irish Language in the context of their influence on the Gaelic League, Wolf feels the undue emphasis put on the League 'ignores the contributions of Irish-Language intellectuals to the concept of nationality.'[37] In reviewing this book Niall Ó Ciosáin credited it as addressing a considerable lacuna in the study of the use of Irish in the

[36] Kevin Collins, *Catholic Churchmen and the Celtic Revival in Ireland 1848 – 1916*, (Dublin, 2002) pp. 125-8.
[37] Nicholas M. Wolf *An Irish Speaking Island: State, Religion, Community and the Linguistic Landscape in Ireland, 1770 – 1870,* (Madison, 2014) p. 9.

nineteenth century and said it provided 'the most complete and best-documented survey available of Irish-speaking communities in the nineteenth century.' Ó Ciosáin, however, takes issue with the work on a number of points. He believes Wolf's claim that Ireland was not an anglicised nation prior to 1870, and was capable of expressing modernity in the Irish language, does not explain how the decline of the language came about. The crux of Ó Ciosáin's criticism is that 'Empirically, while all these arguments are very well-documented, Wolf's evidence is usually qualitative rather than quantitative. As a result, the reader is never sure how typical are the cases being quoted.'[38]

R.V. Comerford, Timothy G. McMahon, John Hutchinson, Tom Garvin, and P.J. Matthews, among others, have examined the era of the Gaelic revival and failed to attach any significance to language organisations operating before 1893.[39] P.J. Matthews in his reappraisal of the Gaelic revival, *Revival: The Abbey Theatre, Sinn Féin, the Gaelic League and the Cooperative Movement,* sought to repudiate the notion that the revival was mystical or anti-modern and highlighted its more progressive aspects in the period from 1899 to 1905. While this otherwise commendable work deals with a limited period, Matthews grossly misunderstands the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language and the Gaelic Union and the context they provide for the revival, claiming: 'These earlier societies tended to be antiquarian, scholarly and concerned with the collection of ancient lore of Ireland before its disappearance with the death of the language.'[40] This statement is wholly

[38] Niall Ó Ciosáin 'Gaelic and Catholic?', *Dublin Review of Books,* 1 July 2015, http://www.drb.ie/essays/gaelic-and-catholic- accessed 8 July 2015.
[39] R.V. Comerford, *Ireland: Inventing the Nation*, (London, 2003); McMahon, *Grand Opportunity;* John Hutchinson, *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism: The Gaelic Revival and the Creation of the Irish Nation State* (London, 1987); Tom Garvin, *The Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics* (Dublin, 1987); P.J. Matthews, *Revival: The Abbey Theatre, Sinn Féin, the Gaelic League and the Cooperative Movement* (Cork, 2003).
[40] Matthews, *Revival*, p. 23.

inaccurate, particularly when applied to the Gaelic Union, the very *raison d'être* of which was to promote Irish as a living language and, while the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language had antiquarian elements, they did not represent the totality of the membership. In February 1877 its publicly stated objective was to preserve Irish as a spoken language.[41] This society had success in having Irish accepted as an examination subject in both the national school system and in the intermediate education system. It also produced affordable works of instruction, for the very purpose of promoting the use of Irish as a living language. Matthews further states that 'right from its inception in 1893 the Gaelic League disregarded the basic assumption of the previous societies', whereas it actually continued the work of the Gaelic Union, absorbing its membership and publications.[42] The failure to acknowledge the contribution of previous organisations is a trend that extends back to the period of the revival and in 1919 Thomas B. Griffith, who had served on the council of the Gaelic Union, stated: 'It always surprises me how in all references to Irish in modern times the Gaelic League is almost always made the starting point' and the 'young men of the present day know almost nothing of it [the early movement], but at least Dr Hyde does.'[43] In 1898 Fr John Nolan wrote to David Comyn, his fellow founder of the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language and the Gaelic Union, and expressed disappointment with the refusal of the Gaelic League to publish an article he had written. He commented on lack of recognition the earlier organisations received, stating: 'I firmly believe these modern movements would not have taken place were it not for your efforts and mine.'[44] Roy Foster in

[41] Address of the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language (NLI, Comyn papers, MS 8468(1)).
[42] Matthews, *Revival*, p. 23.
[43] Thomas B. Griffith to John J. Doyle, 16 December 1919 (NLI, Comyn papers, MS 8466(1)).
[44] John Nolan to David Comyn, 5 October 1898 (NLI, Comyn papers, MS 8467(21)).

*Modern Ireland* appreciated the unbroken thread of Irish cultural nationalism, claiming that to assume that the Celtic Literary Society, Gaelic Athletic Association, and Gaelic League represented a revolution 'is to underestimate both the rhetorical continuity of "literary Fenianism" and the long tradition of Celtic antiquarianism.' While he acknowledges the connections between earlier antiquarianism, legend, and attempts at cultural revival, Foster fails to engage with language organisations prior to the Gaelic League. Furthermore, he tends to dismiss the language revival as 'romantic' and brands many of its adherents 'zealots'.[45]

The papers of David Comyn, deposited in the National Library of Ireland, paint an intimate picture of the genesis of the language revival and Bourke's significance to it. Comyn was a hard-working individual, although one who professed himself to be lazy. He poured himself heart and soul into the establishment of the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language, the Gaelic Union, and the *Gaelic Journal,* to the detriment of his health and mental wellbeing. Bourke was, in a number of ways, the spiritual leader of this movement. He provided the inspiration and influence to Comyn and others in commencing the project that laid the foundations of the Gaelic revival. The state of the Irish language, and Bourke's place in it, at this time is evidenced by the fact that when Comyn attempted to find a copy of *Easy Lessons,* the de facto text for learning Irish, it had gone out of print. There was still a certain demand for the book as the Mechanics Institute had recently commenced classes in Irish and, finding difficulty in securing copies of the *Easy Lessons*, had sent to New York for them.[46] Comyn wrote to Bourke enquiring if a new edition would be forthcoming and thus began an association that lasted until

[45] R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland: 1600-1972* (London, 1988), p. 446.
[46] Comyn to Doyle, 19 October 1875 (NLI, Comyn papers, MS 8466(3)).

Bourke's death and left an indelible mark on the Irish language. Bourke replied that he would bring out a new edition of *Easy Lessons* as soon as he found a publisher who 'suited his views' and that he himself had the plates, having had a disagreement with his previous publisher John Mullany.[47]

The letters David Comyn wrote to his friend and fellow language enthusiast J.J. Doyle offer insights into the beginnings of the language revival. Bourke appears in nearly every letter written in the early stages of the correspondence, indicative of the fact that for one determined to learn Irish in the mid-1870s he was one of the few figures from whom to take guidance. Throughout 1876 these letters, apart from discussion of some personal topics, dealt predominantly with the state of the Irish language and the two men's efforts to learn it. Comyn recommended the *Tuam News* due to its connection with Bourke and its Irish language department indicating that, while the paper may have been local, its focus on Irish meant it attracted attention from language enthusiasts nationally.[48] By the end of 1876 Comyn had begun to think beyond his own self-instruction and formulated a plan which would, ultimately, have an impact on the future of the Irish language. The absence of materials at an intermediate level, more advanced than books of self-instruction yet more accessible than reproductions of ancient manuscripts, had led him to lament to Doyle the want of any periodical in Irish. By November 1876 he had taken matters into his own hands and begun contemplating the publication of a journal. One of the first people he approached was Bourke. A draft of this letter highlights the esteem in which he held Bourke:

[47] Comyn to Doyle, 14 December 1875 (NLI, Comyn papers, MS 8466(3)) and Bourke to Comyn (NLI, Comyn papers, MS 8467(2)).
[48] Comyn to Doyle, 3 January 1876 (NLI, Comyn papers, MS 8466(4)).

> It is one of the disadvantages attending your being so well known in the literary world and particularly as touching the Irish language and literature, that everyone however humble feels himself… at liberty to trouble you by seeking your advice on such matters…The condition of the Irish language is at present day, as of course sir you know and have often expressed, very nearly at death's door.[49]

Comyn's initial plan was modest: the establishment of a club for people learning Irish, which would eventually publish a journal and other affordable and accessible texts. Ulick Bourke, who was by no means immune to flattery, responded favourably to Comyn's letter. Comyn requested of Bourke the 'sanction' of his name, some advice and perhaps an occasional contribution to the Journal. Bourke would never be the most active member of the organisation but he had powerful connections and the 'sanction of his name' was crucial in soliciting support from, among others, Archbishop John MacHale.[50] Comyn initiated discussion with others he knew who had an interest in the language, but he did the bulk of work in formulating the idea for the 'club'. Membership was drawn from those attending Irish classes or learning it by themselves and the journal would help and encourage these students in their efforts.[51] Comyn planned to form classes and hold meetings for the mutual improvement of Irish but his overriding concern was the establishment of a journal. He took inspiration from the Scots Gaelic publication the *Highlander,* but the idea of an Irish language journal was not completely unprecedented, as Bourke had already attempted it. Indeed, the only regular publication in Irish at this time was in the *Tuam News*. While Comyn did not have

[49] Comyn to Bourke, 24 November 1876 (NLI, Comyn papers, MS 8468(6)).
[50] Comyn to Bourke, 24 November 1876 (NLI, Comyn papers, MS 8468(6)).
[51] Plan for S.P.I.L., 18 November 1876 (NLI, Comyn papers, MS 8467).

many plans that had not emanated from Bourke, it seems that his drive and pragmatism helped to bring many of these ideas to fruition. However, at every stage of his endeavours he acknowledged his debt to Bourke and included him in the development of his plans.

By the end of November 1876, Bourke was listed as an honorary member of the fledgling club, which had nine members and plans for classes.[52] Despite this small number it included one man who would become central to both the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language and the Gaelic Union, the Carmelite friar, Fr John Nolan. Nolan quickly took an active role and by the end of December had secured the use of meeting rooms at 4 Bachelors Walk to for the inaugural event. The rooms belonged to a body involved in raising a testimonial for the Home Rule leader, Isaac Butt. This meeting formally established the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language on 29 December 1876.[53] Several high-profile figures attended, including the newspaper editor T.D. Sullivan, the publisher M.H. Gill and several academics, including Brian O'Looney, professor of Celtic at the Catholic University, who chaired the session. Comyn and Nolan considered their involvement essential in order to lend weight to the organisation and to ensure its success. However, even at this early stage Comyn identified problems, telling Doyle: 'I hope all will come well but there are people here who would ruin everything by their crotchets' and 'I wish to mercy it was set on foot but it is very hard to get some of them to believe in the business at all.'[54] The recalcitrance of the other members in moving forward with the journal was to cause particular annoyance for Comyn. He was prescient in assessing what exactly the Society would and wouldn't achieve, telling Doyle on 9 January

[52] Comyn to Doyle, 28 November and 1 December 1876 (NLI, Comyn papers, MS 8466(4)).
[53] Comyn to Doyle, 2 and 13 December 1876 (NLI, Comyn papers, MS 8466(4)).
[54] Comyn to Doyle, 2 January 1877 (NLI, Comyn papers, MS 8466(5)).

1877:

> These big folk may yet do good by getting influence to have Irish taught in the schools but they do not believe in a journal. T.D. Sullivan, O'Looney and Dawson are dead against it but Fr Nolan and I (and a few more) do not consider it dangerous to salvation to differ even with them. So if they don't come to the point very soon we will out with our prospectus ourselves & perhaps may open their eyes by and by.[55]

Underpinning this early disagreement was a rift between those who sought to revitalise the Irish language and return it to everyday use and the antiquarians and academics, whose primary concern was ancient manuscripts and who saw no use in Irish beyond its scholarly value. [56] This rift lay at the heart of what would ultimately develop into a schism that led to the founders of the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language abandoning that organisation for a new project.

On 1 February 1877 the Society met and finalised the address that publicly announced its existence. Bourke chaired this meeting, having travelled to Dublin for a banquet given in Isaac Butt's honour in the Antient Concert Rooms, where he occupied the top table. All who had attended meetings to that point were named as part of the provisional committee, including professor of oriental languages at Trinity, Mir Aulad Ali, a Muslim from India.[57] Bourke's distance from Dublin meant his membership of the Council was to a large degree honorary but he deserves credit for persuading John MacHale to become the society's patron. According to Comyn: 'It was a very special favour and honor (sic) and no small trouble to get John of Tuam's name as he never yet joined any society and has a noted objection to doing

[55] Comyn to Doyle, 9 January 1877 (NLI, Comyn papers, MS 8466(5)).
[56] Comyn to Doyle, 25 May 1877 (NLI, Comyn papers, MS 8466(5)).
[57] Comyn to Doyle, 30 January 1877 (NLI, Comyn papers, MS 8466(5)).

so for any purpose.'[58] The progress of the Society seems to have emboldened Bourke and he continued to help enlist the clergy.[59] In selecting its officers the Society prioritised individuals who would enhance its esteem and who often needed some convincing to become involved at all. This led to a rather cumbersome body with organisational shortcomings and the bulk of the work still fell to Comyn and Nolan.[60] By April 1877 advances were visible with three branch associations formed and another in the process of formation, with the Cork branch said to have 65 members.[61]

These branches organised classes, which led to a need for affordable and accessible textbooks. A primer, the *First Irish Book*, largely based on Bourke's *Easy Lessons*, came out in early September 1877 and met with a favourable response. By 25 September a second edition was already exhausted and a third was ready for press. Plans were advanced for a second book and Comyn stated: 'Nothing will do the cause now but "copy-books" in Irish. Verily our ideas are being enlarged.'[62] The production of the first book marked a watershed for the organisation and by mid-October it was in its sixth edition and in use as the class book in Maynooth, St Jarlath's and two Christian Brothers' schools. *The Freeman's Journal* of 3 December 1877 carried a letter from Home Rule MP, former Fenian Supreme Council member and former St Jarlath's student, John O'Connor Power, praising the work of the organisation. He enclosed a subscription of £1 and stated that 'the success which has so far attended your exertions is, apart entirely from politics, one of the most gratifying and hopeful signs of the vitality of Irish Nationalism.'[63]

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[58] Comyn to Doyle, 4 and 9 April and 25 May 1877 (NLI, Comyn papers, MS 8466(5)).
[59] Comyn to Doyle, 24 October 1877 (NLI, Comyn papers, MS 8466(5)).
[60] Comyn to Doyle, 9 April 1877 (NLI, Comyn papers, MS 8466(5)).
[61] Comyn to Doyle, 14 April 1877 (NLI, Comyn papers, MS 8466(5)).
[62] Comyn to Doyle, 25 September 1877 (NLI, Comyn papers, MS 8466(5)).
[63] *Freeman's Journal*, 3 December 1877.

O'Connor Power added that the Home Rule Confederation of Great Britain had distributed the Society's books and that he had learned of an organisation for the promotion of the language in Brooklyn that had no less than thirty branches. A branch of the Society was formed in Leeds and the secretary of the Home Rule League wrote to the *Freeman* asking for a supply of pamphlets to be forwarded to their associations in England. In addition, the League ordered 250 copies of the *First Irish Book*.[64] O'Connor Power stated that he 'had the advantage of studying Irish for some time under one of the greatest Irish Scholars, Canon Bourke, the Very Rev. President of St Jarlath's College', but that circumstances prevented him from continuing his studies.[65] Two days later the *Freeman* reported that O'Connor Power had been elected to the committee of the Society and that its publications were in use by the Boston Philo-Celtic Society.[66] In O'Connor Power we have a Fenian, a former student of Bourke's and, as discussed in chapter 4, encouraged by him to participate in parliamentary politics. His support for the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language makes explicit the role Bourke played in inculcating his interest in the Irish language. This example of the relationship between politics, culture and identity highlights the connection between language and the national question, decades before the much-vaunted 1915 republican 'infiltration' of the Gaelic League.

Political connections such as these were crucial and by February 1878 the Society was orientating itself as a lobbying organisation. It aimed to have the National Board of Education accept Irish as a subject and a petition was drawn up to be signed by as many 'Bishops, Patrons, types of scholars, learned societies, members of parliament' and other prominent individuals as possible. The

[64] Comyn to Doyle, 14 October 1877 (NLI, Comyn papers, MS 8466(5)).
[65] *Freeman's Journal,* 3 December 1877.
[66] *Freeman's Journal,* 5 December 1877.

organisation did not expect success from lobbying at such an early stage, seeing it as a publicity stunt. They planned to 'make a stir in parliament' and publish the response to show the public that the Irish people, through their representatives, had been slighted by Westminster.[67] In organising the address Comyn conducted an inventory of members and was surprised to find that, rather than the 500 members he thought they had, there were only 187, or 212 including those members of the council who had not paid their subscription.[68] The Archbishop of Tuam's endorsement pleased Comyn: 'Of course as being in our Society he was joined in it but his actual autograph is another matter – it being the first time he ever approached a government board… and we are the only society he ever joined.'[69] Support was also forthcoming from six bishops, several MPs, the lord mayor of Dublin, local politicians, academics and public figures. Support for Irish language education was also expressed politically, in particular by John O'Connor Power, who in April 1878, put a question to the chief secretary in parliament regarding the lapsed Irish language professorships at the Queen's Colleges.[70]

While the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language was not an overtly religious or political organisation the number of priests involved emphasises the association of Catholicism with the language. However, the clergy, as Bourke so often lamented, did not always embrace the cause enthusiastically. When a district inspector of national schools, Mr O'Hara, joined the organisation he was said to have 'a poor opinion of the priests and the way they neglect and defuse the language.' At a meeting of the Society in London in April 1878 only one of the fifty priests invited (thirty of whom were Irish speakers) attended and he was a Scot. This highlights that

[67] Comyn to Doyle, 19 February 1878 (NLI, Comyn papers, MS 8466(6)).
[68] Comyn to Doyle, 8 March 1878 (NLI, Comyn papers, MS 8466(6)).
[69] Comyn to Doyle, 28 March 1878 (NLI, Comyn papers, MS 8466(6)).
[70] Comyn to Doyle, 11 and 18 April 1878 (NLI, Comyn papers, MS 8466(6)).

while the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language had made progress, they fought against a tide of indifference. Speaking of this meeting Comyn said it was wonderful it happened at all as 'there is so much apathy.'[71]

This apathy must have made it all the more surprising for the Society when on 4 July 1878 John E. Sheridan of the office of national education contacted them. He informed them that he had presented their address to the commissioners of national education and they had passed the resolution: 'That the commissioners are prepared to grant results fees for proficiency in the Irish language on the same conditions as those applicable to Greek, Latin and French.'[72] The news delighted Comyn, who said: 'There is no mistake but it is the grandest thing that has been done for Ireland for the last six hundred years.' The unexpected success emboldened the Society and they continued with their efforts to have Irish taught at intermediate level and O'Connor Power moved to present the address to parliament.[73] By the end of the month the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language had scored its second major victory and the government had agreed to include Irish on the new intermediate education scheme. Significantly for the Society, their books were approved as texts for teaching Irish under the scheme. This added impetus to the drive to produce educational materials and it diverted Comyn's attention, for the time being, from his ambition to produce a journal. By February 1879 some progress had been made with publications. There was a new edition of the *First Irish Book*, the *Third Irish Book* was in preparation and *The Pursuit of Diarmuid and Grainne* was being prepared for the intermediate programme. A new edition of Bourke's grammar was also forthcoming and Comyn corresponded with him regarding the

[71] Comyn to Doyle, 20 April 1878 (NLI, Comyn papers, MS 8466(6)).
[72] John E. Sheridan to J.J. MacSweeney, Secretary of the SPIL 4 July 1878 (NLI, Comyn papers, MS 8466(1)).
[73] Comyn to Doyle, 7 July 1878 (NLI, Comyn papers, MS 8466(6)).

price. Bourke had hoped to sell the *Grammar* for four shillings or three shillings and sixpence but Comyn prevailed upon him to allow it to be sold for two shillings and sixpence and released under the auspices of the society, which, presumably, would aid sales.[74]

The organisation seemed in fine fettle in March 1879 when it held committee elections. Membership had increased somewhat with 293 voting papers sent out and 132 returned. Lord Francis Coyngham was elected president, with Isaac Butt, The O'Conor Don, the Bishop of Cloyne and the Rev. Samuel Haughton elected as its vice presidents. John MacHale was patron of the society and Bourke sat on its committee, alongside T.D. Sullivan, John Stuart Blackie, Samuel Ferguson, T.W. Moffet, president of Queen's College Galway, O'Connor Power and a number of other high-ranking academics and clergymen.[75] However, around this time discord began to appear in the organisation and the elections had to be rerun, with Comyn instructing Doyle to vote tactically in order to exclude some candidates from the committee.[76] Disputes arose over attempts to co-opt certain individuals to the council and over the appointment of paid officers, which deepened the rift in the organisation. The division is summarised in an extant copy of an uncredited speech given at a meeting and kept amongst Comyn's papers: 'Those who do work should have a more important voice. Great names may be still useful but they are more likely to become an incubus to a society like ours.'[77] Writing to J.J. Doyle in 1919 Thomas B. Griffith, a mutual friend of Comyn and Doyle, and judging by the correspondence the person to whom Comyn was closest, spoke of how after so many he years he was still moved by 'the cursed business of [J.J.] MacSweeney [secretary

[74] Comyn to Doyle, 17 February and 4 March 1879 (NLI, Comyn papers, MS 8466(7)).
[75] *Freeman's Journal*, 21 March 1879.
[76] Comyn to Doyle, 4 April 1879 (NLI, Comyn papers, MS 8466(7)).
[77] Unsigned speech to council of SPIL (NLI, Comyn papers, MS 8467(5)).

of the society] and how he got on the council his followers who simply paralysed the society.' Furthermore, Griffith stated that Comyn had no time to enforce discipline in financial matters, and that nobody took responsibility in this regard.[78]

In the summer of 1879, while Mayo was in the grips of agrarian agitation, Bourke found himself embroiled in a different sort of conflict. He contacted the council demanding payment for his work in writing and editing the *Third Irish Book.* Claiming that Comyn and Nolan had approached him to undertake the work, he now demanded any profits arising from it or, failing that, that it be published under the auspices of the Society but he would be acknowledged as the editor and author, as in the case of the *College Irish Grammar*.[79] On 13 September 1879 M.H. Close wrote to Comyn, expressing his dissatisfaction that £10 had been given to Bourke, as he claimed no legal basis for this existed. Comyn at this stage, like Bourke, had become estranged from the Society and Close seemed intent on causing disagreement between the two. He claimed that Bourke had not acknowledged the work of the publishing committee, principally Comyn. However, he also made it clear that prior to Bourke contacting the society demanding payment there had already been a split and that Bourke claimed it was this which had motivated him to act. Close attempted to convince Comyn that Fr Nolan agreed with him, saying that he and Nolan thought the book neither 'English nor Irish' and that what Comyn and Bourke were saying was at odds.[80]

From the discussions between Bourke and Comyn it appears that Bourke was always eager to be paid for his work (or, as Close insisted, the work of others) but this incident was one of a number of disputes that had arisen over the use of Society

[78] Griffith to Doyle, 16 December 1919 (NLI, Comyn papers, MS 8466(1)).
[79] MacSweeney to Comyn, 11 July 1879 (NLI, Comyn papers, MS 8467(5)).
[80] Close to Comyn, 13 September 1879 (NLI, Comyn papers, MS 8467(5)).

funds.[81] Financial issues had also surfaced at the time of the 1879 elections with reference to paid officers and it may be symptomatic of the clash of personalities and approaches that undermined the Society. Close implied that as the *Third Irish Book* had been entrusted to Comyn, if Bourke's claim of authorship was true, then Comyn had neglected his duties and misrepresented the situation. If Close was attempting to make an ally of Comyn against Bourke, then he seems to have taken a rather bizarre tack. It is clear that Comyn was no longer working on behalf of the society and this incident cannot have helped in any sort of rapprochement. Comyn must have responded with hostility as in Close's next letter he was at pains to explain that he had not intended to cause offence: 'You have misapprehended my last letter in the most extraordinary manner. Neither I nor any other human being that I know ever brought the accusations that I mentioned.'[82] Instead, Close maintained that these accusations could be brought if Bourke's claims were taken seriously. In short, the options available to Comyn, from an organisation from which he was now estranged, were to denounce Ulick Bourke, for whom he had shown nothing but respect, as a fraud and second-rate scholar or have his own integrity called into question. Regardless of the details of the dispute around the *Third Irish Book*, the main benefactor of the split would be the Irish language as Comyn chose to maintain the alliances he had and progress in a direction that freed him from the politics that bogged down the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language. Ulick Bourke would play an integral part in this new direction and help to secure the backing of the clergy.

[81] Close to Comyn, 12 June (NLI, Comyn papers, MS 8467(5)).
[82] Close to Comyn, 18 September 1879 (NLI, Comyn papers, MS 8467(5)).

On 27 December 1879 Comyn wrote to Doyle telling him he was still in ill health, partly due to 'nervousness'. His thoughts on the Society were unambiguous, and he claimed he had been made a fool of for the credit and profit of others and that he had 'uncharitable and unchristian feelings' against his former colleagues 'from sorrow and disappointment at the wreck of that which I was a large part & from which I hoped so much.' He did not specify individuals he felt aggrieved with, but his grievance was not, as Close sought, with Bourke. Comyn said that he, Fr Nolan, and some friends were about to commence a new project 'on safer and better veins and having the benefit of experience.' They intended to produce cheap books suited for schools under the title Gaelic Union Publications, edited by 'members of the Council of the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language.' In order to present continuity, Comyn had secured the use of the former address of the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language, 19 Kildare Street, from the owners of the property. Comyn claimed they had already received some help and were sure of even more, in the form of the support of the bishops, secured by Bourke. Bourke had even more influence due to his new position on the Catholic Education Committee, which had been formed with a representative from each province to keep the Catholic schools at the top of the intermediate system of education. Comyn claimed they aimed not to replace or imitate the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language, but rather to carry on elements of its work as a group of individuals and to solicit subscriptions to produce works in Irish and award prizes.[83] As I will show, however, this group attained considerable momentum and came not only to rival the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language, but to surpass it.

[83] Comyn to Doyle, 27 December 1879 (NLI, Comyn papers, MS 8466(7)).

Upon its institution as a society in 1882, its rule book stated: 'the Gaelic Union was established a few years since "to encourage the Preservation and Cultivation of the Irish Language" by establishing a Publication and Prize Fund, to be applied in publishing a cheap Gaelic literature and in rewarding teachers and pupils for successful teaching and study of the language.'[84] This it did and from 1880 to 1882 the subscribers to the Gaelic Union contributed to the prize fund rather than to the organisation. A report of a Gaelic Union meeting in the *Freeman's Journal* of 7 March 1881 listed subscribers, including Douglas Hyde and the Right Rev. William Fitzgerald, Bishop of Ross. At the meeting reports were read detailing the progress of teaching in schools and a pamphlet, containing a record of the activities of the previous year and a list of subscribers, was made available on request. On 7 November 1881 the *Freeman* reported that Douglas Hyde and the Rev. Eusaby Cleaver, the latter of whom had, like Bourke, been a member of the Ossianic Society, had been appointed to the council of the organisation and that Bourke had been appointed examiner in Celtic to the Royal University of Ireland, where they hoped he could positively influence the teaching of Irish.[85] The involvement of Douglas Hyde, who in 1881 was only twenty-one years of age, alongside former members of the Ossianic Society demonstrates the bridging point the Gaelic Union represented between the different eras and forms of cultural nationalism. Furthermore, Michael Cusack, founder of the Gaelic Athletic Association, sat on the council of the Gaelic Union from 1882 until at least 1885, highlighting the broad reach of its influence.[86]

The rules of the Union, published in 1882, stated in its early days numbers

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[84] *The Gaelic Union for the Preservation and Cultivation of the Irish Language: Council, Object, Rules, Means, Associations, Class Rules etc.* (Dublin, 1882), p. 27.
[85] *Freeman's Journal*, 7 November 1881.
[86] *Freeman's Journal*, 18 December 1882 and 26 March 1885.

had been intentionally small in order to carry out the limited tasks they had set themselves. However, the desire of a large number of people to join had encouraged the council of the Gaelic Union to formally institute themselves as a society. The make-up of the council was overwhelmingly clerical and its patron was Archbishop Croke of Cashel. It aimed to establish a publication and prize fund to assist in the publication of works in Irish and to reward teachers and students who excelled in Irish. Other aims of the Gaelic Union included the organisation of Irish classes, to support the teaching of Irish in schools, and to encourage use of the language generally. These aims nearly exactly mirrored the measures previously outlined by Bourke for the preservation of the Irish language. The Gaelic Union rule book of 1882 claimed that the number of students taking examinations in Irish had increased from 19 in 1879 to 117 in 1880, the year of the prize fund's inauguration.[87] However, as Irish had only been approved as an examination subject in 1878 this may have overstated the incentive provided by the prizes. Students of St Jarlath's College, Tuam, where Bourke had previously been president, featured heavily in the list of prize-winners. Perhaps the most notable achievement of the Gaelic Union was to establish its journal *Irisleabhar na Gaedhilge* (the *Gaelic Journal*), which the Gaelic League eventually took over and which remained in print until 1909.

It seems the dissatisfaction Bourke, Comyn, and Nolan felt with the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language was not confined to themselves and a large number of other members migrated to the Gaelic Union. The two organisations shared the same patron, Archbishop Croke, the first patron of the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language, John MacHale, having passed away. They even shared committee members. The first attempt to amalgamate the two societies,

[87] *Gaelic Union Rules*, p. 27.

instigated by Close, came in 1880. However, while it seems Comyn and Nolan bore him no ill will, they displayed no enthusiasm to grasp the olive branch, content to be free of the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language and happy with the success of their new organisation.[88] Attempts to merge the two organisations were again made in 1883 at the instigation of Croke, but these never came to fruition, ostensibly because of differences on how to proceed with the amalgamation.[89] The Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language, having haemorrhaged its most effective members, continued in existence, albeit ineffectively, and still held weekly meetings as late as the 1940s.

The establishment of the *Gaelic Journal* set the Gaelic Union apart from its rival organisation and allowed it to gain traction in promoting Irish language and culture. In October 1882 a circular announced the intention of the Gaelic Union to commence publishing a journal and by December of that year the list of subscribers had grown to 700, including Michael Davitt who praised 'the thoroughly national effort of reviving our grand old mother tongue.'[90] The establishment of the journal must have been a huge blow to the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language as to obtain it one had to subscribe to the Gaelic Union. By 1885 the Gaelic Union was lobbying parliament on Irish language education and had moved its weekly meetings from their humble beginnings on Gardiner Place to the Mansion House, proving that the Gaelic League did not emerge to fill a vacuum but, rather, built on what had gone before. [91] Upon its establishment in 1893 the Gaelic League absorbed the Gaelic Union, along with all of its publications and members. The president of

[88] Comyn to Doyle, 30 May 1880 (NLI, Comyn Papers, MS 8466(8)); Close to Comyn, 8 March 1880 (NLI, Comyn Papers, MS 8467(5)); Nolan to Comyn, 5 May 1880 (NLI, Comyn Papers, MS 8467(21)).
[89] *Freeman's Journal,* 9 November 1883.
[90] *Freeman's Journal*, 5 October 1882 and 18 December 1882
[91] *Freeman's Journal*, 26 March and 25 July 1885.

the League, Douglas Hyde, had served on the committee of the Gaelic Union and the link between the two organisations is so clear as to make the lack of historical attention paid to it a mystery.[92]

## Conclusion

Ulick Bourke is an important link in the chain of cultural nationalism that stretched from the Ossianic Society, through his Irish language and antiquarian writings, to the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language, the Gaelic Union and ultimately the Gaelic League. The involvement of the likes of Michael Cusack, founder of the GAA, and Douglas Hyde, founder of the Gaelic League, in the Gaelic Union shows that in the field of cultural nationalism there are no clear beginnings and endings. As the next chapter demonstrates, Ulick Bourke situated the Irish language in the context of ideas of race, identity and nationality, and used the Irish language to provide an antiquarian and philological justification for nationhood. The Gaelic revivalists of the later nineteenth century did not make a clean break with the early to mid-century antiquarianism and Gaelic legend remained an important part of the rhetoric and pedagogy of nationalists into the twentieth century. The use of the name Fenian to describe the Irish Republican Brotherhood from the late 1850s onwards shows that a clear connection existed between the deployment of antiquarian texts and political action. The Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language, the Gaelic Union, and the Gaelic League included mythology among their publications and it formed an integral part of the *Gaelic Journal*.

The 1916 rising and subsequent developments have coloured perceptions of

[92] David Comyn, 27 March 1896 (NLI, Comyn Papers, MS 8468(3)).

the Gaelic League and cultural nationalism generally. Many of those involved in the rising were also active in the Gaelic League and the IRB had wrested control of the organisation from more moderate elements in 1915. This has created a trend whereby studies of Irish cultural nationalism have been somewhat teleological. There has been a tendency to work backwards from the 1916 rising, to the IRB take-over of the league in 1915, to its expansion from 1899, and back further still to its foundation in 1893, the genesis of which is seen as Douglas Hyde's 1892 speech 'On the necessity for de-anglicising Ireland'. However, scholarly examinations have stopped at this point, seeing it as the genesis of the movement. Studies have neglected the actual origins of the narrowly-defined Gaelic revival and tend to view the foundation of organisations such as the Gaelic Athletic Association or the Gaelic League as the beginning of cultural nationalism rather than the development of a pre-existing trend.

P.J. Matthews and Timothy G. MacMahon are to be commended for attempting to redress narrow definitions of the revival. Both repudiate the idea that it was atavistic or only relevant in relation to subsequent political developments, yet they too accept 1893 as its starting point and overlook the significance of earlier movements.[93] Roy Foster realises the continuity of the revival from earlier forms of cultural nationalism, but dismisses the language revival to focus on the Anglo-Irish literary revival, as attested to by his two-volume biography of W.B. Yeats. Hyde's speech to the National Literary Society in 1892 'On the necessity for de-anglicising Ireland' was, according to Foster, essentially apolitical as he sought to create an Irish identity that appealed as much to unionists as nationalists. He claims that Hyde trod very carefully 'between the fissures opened up in post-Parnell politics.'[94] However,

[93] Matthews, *Revival* and McMahon, *Grand Opportunity.*
[94] R.F. Foster, *W.B. Yeats: A Life* (2 vols, Oxford, 1997), ii, 126.

whether attempting to create an Irish identity that appealed to both unionists and nationalists was non-political is open to debate. It can be argued that attempting to create an Irish identity that appealed to the two main political traditions is an act that can have political implications. John Hutchinson engages with this point in *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism*, stating, 'cultural nationalism is a movement of moral regeneration which seeks to re-unite the different aspects of the nation… by returning to the creative life-principle of the nation.'[95] Or, as Terry Eagleton puts it, 'if history is divisive, culture is unifying.'[96]

While the aforementioned studies all provide interesting insights into cultural nationalism, and the Gaelic League in particular, they are united in their neglect of the pre-revival cultural nationalism. As I highlight in chapter 2, the cultural nationalism of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was primarily antiquarian in nature. Scant attention has been paid to the link between these avenues of study and the revival forms of cultural nationalism. Hutchinson's *The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism* identifies three 'ethnic revivals' in Ireland which sought to return to an identity in Ireland's Gaelic past and 'dichotomise Ireland from England': the mid eighteenth century, the 1830s and the 1890s.[97] Not once does Hutchinson mention the Gaelic Union or the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language. Tom Garvin similarly neglects these two organisations in *The Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics* and attributes the emergence of cultural nationalist organisations in the 1890s to the weakening of parliamentary forms of nationalism.[98] In fact the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language and the Gaelic Union had come into existence at a crucial juncture in the Irish parliamentary tradition. The

[95] Hutchinson, *Dynamics*, p.16.
[96] Terry Eagleton, *Scholars and Rebels in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Oxford, 1999), p. 20.
[97] Hutchinson, *Dynamics,* p. 49.
[98] Tom Garvin, *The Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics*, p. 100.

formalisation of Home Rule as a movement underscored the politics of the 1870s and the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language emerged from this backdrop. The Gaelic Union came into existence during the era of the Land War and the New Departure and as Charles Stewart Parnell was in the ascendant and consolidating control of the Home Rule movement. While the Gaelic League may have formed after the death of Parnell, its predecessor operated primarily at a time when he exercised considerable control over Irish nationalism. Early language movements provided a clear link between the antiquarian forms of cultural nationalism and the more politicised and better documented revival that occurred from the 1890s onwards. No figure better illustrates this than Ulick Bourke.

For Ulick Bourke, the Knock apparition happened when his labours in the Irish language finally bore fruit. While there may have been division in the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language at the time of the apparition this cannot have taken away from the confidence he must have felt at the emergence of an Irish language movement. As Bourke saw both language and religion as linked to Irish national identity, the apparition at Knock can be placed in the context of a burgeoning national identity. The Knock apparition would be painted upon a canvas of converging social, cultural and political confidence and action.

**Undated photograph of Canon Ulick Bourke** (Courtesy of the Archdiocese of Tuam)

# Chapter 2: Origins and Identity – Shaping the Past

The relationship between language, culture, and national consciousness played a central role in Bourke's writing on the Irish language and his forays into Gaelic scholarship extended beyond its instruction and preservation. He was also interested in the origins of the language and the people to whom it belonged, leading him to publish two books of antiquarianism, *The Aryan Origins of the Gaelic Race and Language* in 1875 and *Pre-Christian Ireland* in 1887. *Aryan Origins* was a rambling and poorly structured work that sought to use philology to prove the oriental origins of the Irish people and their language. Despite its deficiencies it received many favourable reviews and sold relatively well. Several of its chapters dealt with the current state of Irish rather than its supposed subject and the pedantic and prolix style of the work makes it an infuriating read. *Pre-Christian Ireland,* on the other hand, is shorter, more succinct and focused and was intended as an introduction to Irish prehistory, or at least a certain perception of it. It is, for the most part, free of the attempts at philology that mark the *Aryan Origins*.

According to Clare O'Halloran, most European nations had origin myths based on founding fathers that scholars gradually discarded during the Renaissance as they began to make better use of sources. However, Irish and Scottish writers 'continued to be heavily dependent on the medieval origins myth which, owing to a shared Gaelic culture, was common in both countries.'[1] Published at a time when academic history was succeeding antiquarianism, Bourke's work sought to reconcile a romanticised antiquarian view of the Gaelic past with contemporary historical research. The works of writers such as George Petrie, Eugene O'Connor, and John

[1] Clare O'Halloran, *Golden Ages and Barbarous Nations: Antiquarian Debate and Cultural Politics in Ireland, c. 1750-1800* (Notre Dame, 2005), p. 13.

O'Donovan had changed the understanding of Irish history, in terms of both monuments and manuscripts, and organisations such as the Ordnance Survey and Royal Irish Academy had been instrumental in providing frameworks for the professionalization of scholarship in Ireland. The Celtic and Archaeological Society and the Ossianic Society also played important roles in reproducing and disseminating antiquarian texts and the makeup of their membership demonstrated that the realms of the professional and the amateur scholar were not always clearly delineated. It should be noted, however, that while Petrie, O'Donovan and O'Curry — the holy trinity of nineteenth-century Irish archaeology and ancient history — were crucial to the professionalization of the field, their works still show evidence of the deficiencies in contemporary sources and methodologies.

Writings such as Bourke's appealed particularly to the Catholic middle classes who wanted to appear current with scientific research methods, but for sentimental or political reasons wished to retain a particular vision of a Gaelic Ireland.[2] Bourke's forays into the fields of antiquarianism and philology were on shaky ground, both empirically and theoretically, and have little or no value as works of scholarship. His work was highly derivative and included quotations that ran to several pages. He interpreted the work of others in a manner that reinforced his own arguments in order to advance his preferred narrative of Irish origins. His antiquarian writings contain an odd mixture of Irish mythology, philology, pseudo-history, orientalism, biblical scholarship and antiquarianism, the ultimate goal of which was to present a continuity in Irish culture and identity, with a direct link to biblical figures through the person of Noah's son Japheth. In the context of this dissertation,

[2] Joep Leerson, *Remembrance and Imagination: Patterns in the Historical and Literary Representations of Ireland in the Nineteenth-Century* (Cork, 1996), pp 68-9, 72, 101, 138-40.

however, these works clearly illustrate Bourke as a creator of narratives who sought to influence national consciousness through his writings.

Terry Eagleton has said that antiquarianism differed between Ireland and England as in Ireland 'remembering the past has been, unlike England, largely a radical matter.' However, Bourke shared certain traits with generalists on the other side of the channel. Eagleton further stated that such generalists could exercise cultural leadership and moral authority and by

> linking literature and politics, oratory and moral exhortation, these men lay claim to spiritual leadership in a society whose traditional governors are gradually being ousted by industrial capitalism. Like all 'general' intellectuals, they are stranded somewhere between academic and amateur, combining at their best the rigour of the former with the latter's indifference to professional demarcations.[3]

For Eagleton, nationalism played a role in encouraging the diversity of Irish scholars and gave a definite direction to their studies. Equating history with culture meant that a pursuit that would have otherwise remained in the hands of the traditional intellectual passed into the hands of the organic, or non-professional, intellectual, who could use it in an attempt to forge cultural unity.[4]

Antiquarianism in Ireland had begun as an elite pursuit generally undertaken by the Anglo-Irish gentry, who were educated, had time on their hands, and finances to assemble libraries. Joep Leerson says of the development of Irish antiquarianism that it originally involved assembling 'the fragmented and ill-understood remains of Gaelic history' between the early seventeenth and late eighteenth century for

[3] Eagleton, *Scholars and Rebels*, p. 10.
[4] Ibid., p. 20.

dissemination to a non-Gaelic public. The worsening of relations between the Anglo-Irish elite and the British government after the Act of Union of 1800 led to the absorption of this interpretation of Gaelic history into the national narrative.[5] Wealthy and educated Catholics came to be involved in the study of antiquities and often, as with Bourke, Catholic clergy had the time and resources to engage in this pursuit. Moreover, they too had agendas for influencing interpretations of the past. Since the Norman writer Giraldus Cambrensis had portrayed the Irish as uncivilised barbarians and bad Christians, who practiced incest and cannibalism, Irish historical narratives had taken on an anti-imperial slant as writers sought to vindicate their claims to civilisation by portraying the Gaelic past in a positive light.

## The Ossianic Society

Bourke's involvement with antiquarianism began in the 1850s through the Ossianic Society, named for the mythical poet and warrior Oisín. As with the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language and the Gaelic Union there is a dearth of secondary material on the Ossianic Society, demonstrating once again the often-limited scope of Irish cultural history. According to an unpublished 1998 thesis by Robert Somerville-Woodward, the Ossianic Society grew out of the Dublin Celtic Society.[6] Somerville-Woodward sets out to examine the Irish language in the nineteenth century, but only deals briefly with antiquarian societies, before dedicating chapters to prominent politicians such as Daniel O'Connell and William Smith O'Brien, who did little or nothing for the language. He ends with a short conclusion that deals briefly with the Society for the Preservation of the Irish

[5] Leerson, *Remembrance and Imagination*, p. 12.
[6] Robert Somerville-Woodward, '"Language without a Mouth": the Development of an Irish Language Consciousness, c. 1820-1878.' (Ph.D. Thesis, UCD, 1998).

Language, but misses the overall context of the language revival.

In 1854 the Dublin Celtic Society was incorporated into the Irish Archaeological Society, which John O'Donovan and Eugene O'Curry had founded in 1840. Although the Ossianic Society was in place before this amalgamation, the absorption of the Dublin Celtic Society meant many of its members gravitated to the Ossianic Society rather than the expanded Irish Archaeological Society. The latter had strong links to the Royal Irish Academy and as a result its members, especially O'Curry, controlled access to manuscripts. The make-up of the council of each organisation deepened the divide. The Ossianic Society insisted on its council members being Irish scholars, whereas the Irish Archaeological Society consisted primarily of the Anglo-Irish elite.[7] The Ossianic Society was concerned with retrieving mythology from manuscripts and putting it into a printed form and as such its interest in the Irish language existed in an antiquarian context. Yet, it spoke of the need to act with the same sort of urgency as Bourke later applied to his calls for the preservation of the living language stating their aim was

> to do for Ireland what the Scotch have done for Scotland, and the Welsh have done for Wales—to reveal and place beyond danger of perishing for ever some of the monuments of the ancient language of their country. This is a task that every nation has executed for itself, except barbarous and savage tribes. Ireland alone, alas! has followed the example of the latter, and there is fear that if she does not rise up and redeem the past years of apathy, with respect to her native literature, the work will be forever taken out of her hands.[8]

[7] Ibid., p. 148.
[8] Nicholas O'Kearney (ed), *Transactions of the Ossianic Society for the Year 1854* (Dublin, 1855), p. 10.

The awareness that Ireland was lagging behind its neighbours in preserving its antiquities heightened the urgency of this task and Bourke later expressed similar concerns about the state of the Irish Language compared to Scottish Gaelic and Welsh.

The volumes the Ossianic Society produced took the form of 'transactions'. They consisted of a few initial pages dealing with the business of the Society, a lengthy introduction on the nature of legend and antiquarianism and then the text of a legend itself. The first publication, an account of the battle of Gabhra, showed that Bourke was not a member of the committee in 1853 but notable antiquarians such as John O'Donovan and Standish H. O'Grady were. The opening page stated that on 17 March 1853

> A few individuals, interested in the preservation and publication of Irish Manuscripts, met…for the express purpose of forming a Society whose object should be the publication of Fenian poems, tales, and romances, illustrative of the Fenian period of Irish history, in the Irish language and character, with literal translations and notes explanatory of the text, when practicable.

The next meeting on 9 May brought the Ossianic Society into existence, with the council to 'consist entirely of Irish Scholars.' [9] In 1855 when the Ossianic Society held its annual general meeting at 9 Anglesea Street, the premises of bookseller and publisher John O'Daly, in Dublin Bourke attended and he proposed another person, Rev. Bartholomew Hester, PP Ardcarna, Boyle, as a member. Bourke also seconded a motion thanking the Royal Irish Academy for granting permission to collate its

[9] Nicholas O'Kearney (ed), *Transactions of the Ossianic Society for the Year 1853* (Dublin, 1854), p. 5.

*Dialogue of the Signs*.[10]

The rules of the Society devolved administrative responsibility to the president, vice-presidents and council members, 'each of whom must necessarily be an Irish scholar.' Membership of the society was set at three shillings and every member was entitled to a volume of the society's publications, at least one per year. The membership fee was fixed at a low rate to make it affordable to as many people as possible and payment was not due until the book was ready for delivery, a policy that was later abandoned when members became lax in their payments. Subscriptions paid for the publication of the books and council members undertook all editing work on a voluntary basis. Twenty extra copies were produced for contingencies and it seems that the publications were not for general dissemination but confined to the membership. As a result they were quite rare and much prized by enthusiasts later in the century. The Society commenced operations with fifty members and by the time of the publication of the second transactions the number had grown to 166. While the council sought to encourage the revival of national identity it aimed to be non-sectarian in both a religious and political sense. The 'fourteenth general rule' of the Society, declared 'that nothing bearing upon the religious and political differences which prevail in this country shall be introduced into the Society's publications.'[11]

Standish Hayes O'Grady, the organisation's president, chaired the 1856 annual general meeting. O'Grady was an antiquarian who published several works of mythology (and cousin to the younger and more prominent Standish James O'Grady, who came to the fore in the later revival). Ulick Bourke, aged only twenty-six, was elected a vice-president, a significant honour when one considers the calibre of some

[10] *Freeman's Journal,* 17 May 1855.
[11] O'Kearney, *Transactions for 1854,* pp 8-10.

of the members. Membership had increased to 291 from 116 in the previous year, which was credited to the low price of subscription. The two works of mythology published so far had 'met with the greatest appreciation' and 'gained high praise from some of the most influential reviews in the kingdom.' Plans were discussed to produce the next two editions, the *Pursuit of Diarmuid and Grainne,* which the president had prepared from the best copies that could be procured, and the *Táin Bo Chuailigne*, which was to be produced from a manuscript owned by the Rev. Patrick Lamb, PP Newtownhamilton, Co. Armagh, a member of the Society. The latter publication would never materialise.[12]

At the eighth annual meeting of the society in 1861 the president was former Young Irelander William Smith O'Brien. Membership had increased to 833 from 746 in the previous year and five volumes of transactions had been published to date. In addition, its affiliated society in New York had 160 members. The committee alluded to financial problems in its criticism of members who were lax in paying their subscriptions.[13] Bourke was re-elected vice-president and remained so until the organisation's demise in 1863. The council's tenth annual meeting was its last and they expressed regret that they had been unable to publish a contemplated volume due to lack of funds. The council blamed the tardiness of subscriptions, although the debts of the Society had decreased from £23 16*s* 8*d* to less than £13. Regardless, the Society intended to print its seventh volume.[14] However, no further publications were ever produced, which was unfortunate for Bourke as he was to have been the editor of the Society's eighth publication, *A Tract on the Great Actions of Finn Mac Chumhaill*.[15]

[12] *Freeman's Journal*, 19 March 1856.
[13] *Freeman's Journal,* 12 April 1861.
[14] *Freeman's Journal,* 21 March 1863.
[15] O'Kearney, *Transactions* for 1854, p. xi.

The work of the Ossianic Society and other groups in preserving and disseminating legend in the early to mid-nineteenth century influenced the later Gaelic revival. David Comyn noted how much the Celtic Society, the Historical and Archaeological Society of Ireland and the Ossianic Society had done to preserve the antiquities of Ireland and credited them with the fact that those works had survived at all.[16] Bourke's involvement in the Ossianic Society and in the later Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language and Gaelic Union marks him as one of only two individuals (the other being the Reverend Eusaby Cleaver) who participated in both the mid-nineteenth century antiquarian movement and the late-nineteenth century language revival. Bourke represents a thread of continuity between the two, which highlights his centrality to cultural nationalism in the 'pre-revival' nineteenth century. Bourke's experiences with the Ossianic Society may have led to his distrust of the antiquarian element in the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language, but the influence of the organisation on his own thinking is apparent in *Pre-Christian Ireland* and *The Aryan Origins of the Gaelic Race and Language*.

## Philology, Orientalism, and Bourke's Methodology

*The Aryan Origins of the Gaelic Race and Language* was in many ways Bourke's most ambitious work of scholarship. He suggested that the Gaelic people were Celts descended from the Aryan people of the Middle East and that they had made their way to Ireland in a series of migrations over a number of millennia. Discussions on the origins of the Irish people were commonplace at the time and usually centred on their Milesian and Phoenician origins, as various writers and thinkers constructed narrative frameworks that they felt explained the movement of

[16] Comyn to Doyle, 3 January 1876 (NLI, Comyn papers, MS 8466(4)).

the Celtic people from the Middle East to Ireland. This involved a considerable amount of conjecture and Bourke, like many others, supported his ideas with pseudo-scientific argument. For Bourke, philology showed the migratory patterns of the Aryan peoples, yet anything resembling concrete evidence seems rather sparse in his works. Some of his general statements on language are more or less accurate, such as:

> It is certain that there was a primeval speech, called at present by scholars the Aryan tongue; that it was once spoken by the people who lived in the high table lands of Armenia and Iran; that it was carried to Europe by the inhabitants who emigrated from the land now ruled by the Shah, that Greek, Latin, Keltic or Irish, Slavonic or Bulgarian, Lithuanian, Gothic, or German, are dialects of that common pre-historic speech.[17]

However, he was capable of making fantastic imaginative leaps in order to highlight the superiority of Gaelic or of the Celtic origins of the Gaelic people:

> A thousand years anterior to the days of Homer, and before the Greek was matured in southern Europe and on the coast of Ionia, the second sprout of the Greco-Italo-Keltic branch was planted in the Italian peninsula, and there, like the grain of mustard- seed, grew into a large tree, the branches of which ultimately filled the whole earth. The Keltic branch took root for a time in Northern Italy. It bore fruit, and, like the oak, scattered its seed to the west in Iberia or Spain, to the north-west in Keltic Gaul, along the banks of the Garonne, the Loire, and the Seine. The best part was wafted to our 'noble island' Inis Alga, where it sprung up and formed the luxuriant tree of Irish Gaelic, which at this very day presents all the features that mark the primeval

[17] Bourke, *Aryan Origins,* p. 115.

speech of the Aryan race and country.[18]

Irish Gaelic, like the vast majority of western European languages, is a member of the Indo-European family and these languages share a common ancestor, known as proto-Indo-European, which began to spread from its point of origin some 4,000 years ago. Scholars have suggested a number of possibilities for the birthplace of this language, including the shores of the Caspian Sea and the Russian steppes, and as it spread across Europe it evolved in different ways. Bourke's own knowledge of the role of the English language in Irish society should have made it plain to him that language and race were two separate things. A small group with superior technology and organisational structures can colonise a land and impose their language and culture without displacing the native population. The use of the term Celtic to describe the family of languages to which Irish belongs results from nineteenth-century philologists equating languages with the origin legends of the lands where they were found. The Celtic languages of the islands of Britain and Ireland were known as insular Celtic languages, as opposed to continental Celtic languages. The continental Celtic languages, the most famous of which is Gaulish, are now completely extinct. The insular Celtic languages are divided into two groups, one of which, Brythonic, includes Welsh, the now extinct Cornish language, and Breton. The other group, the Goidelic languages, includes Irish Gaelic, Scots Gaelic (brought to Scotland by the Scoti or Irish people in the tenth century) and Manx.[19]

Most historians and archaeologists dispute the existence of a Celtic people and argue that, while Greeks and Romans may have referred to outsiders as Keltoi,

[18] Ibid., p. 113.
[19] Malcolm Chapman, *The Celts: Construction of a Myth* (New York, 1991); Benjamin W. Fortson IV, *Indo-European Languages and Culture: An Introduction* (Malden, 2004); Anna Giacolone Ramat and Paolo Ramat (eds) *The Indo-European Languages* (New York, 1998).

this was a generic label for barbarians rather than a homogenous group. This does not, however, negate the fact that there are material cultures and languages labelled as Celtic. It is not within the remit of this thesis to question how closely these correspond to Gaelic culture and languages and the issue is far from settled, with some geneticists and linguists putting forward arguments which support the notion of a Celtic people.[20] We can be certain, however, that the extrapolation of Aryan origins for Irish people based on linguistic similarities proves nothing as it tells us simply about the origins of a family of languages, rather than a race of people. All populations on earth have migrated at some point and migration persists to this day. People when they move may assimilate or dominate but regardless society and culture constantly shift and evolve. Bourke sought not to understand these processes, but to find evidence to support his preconceived ideas about the ancient pedigree of a Gaelic race and language.

As a work of philology, *Aryan Origins* falls short of the standards of its field. However, a work of pure philology was not what Bourke attempted to achieve, whether consciously or not. Despite his pretensions to the science of language, his grasp of scientific principles, such as the nature of proof and the relationship between causation and correlation, are poor at best. Often drawing heavily on the work of others, Bourke emphasised parallels between Gaelic and other languages. These similarities do indicate that they are from the same linguistic family, a fact undisputed by linguists, but he then extrapolated from this that Irish is a language as old as Sanskrit or that these similarities prove the origin legends contained in the *Lebor Gabála Érenn,* or the *Book of Invasions.* Bourke asserted repeatedly that Irish

[20] Bryan Sykes, *Saxons, Vikings and Celts: The Genetic Roots of Britain and Ireland* (New York, 2007); Kim McCone, *The Celtic Question: Modern Constructs and Ancient Realities*, (Dublin, 2008).

is one of the oldest languages in the world and that as such it has a value to philologists and scholars equal to that of Greek, Roman and Sanskrit. He stressed the beauty of the language and its suitability to rhyme and song. At the core of Bourke's scholarship was a plea for the retention and revival of the Irish language. He did not merely attempt to prove Irish is an old or important language; he gave this reason for encouraging its use.

Bourke's claims to an ancient lineage for the Irish people, equal to that of the Greek or Roman civilizations, is part of a tradition of subjugated peoples attempting to prove their worthiness. References to the eleventh-century *Lebor Gabála Érenn* and the seventeenth-century cleric Míchael Ó Cléirigh, among others, pepper his work and situate him in this tradition, even if he felt he brought something new to the discussion. Despite Bourke's portrayal of philology as a new science — an instrument for shedding light on the darkest recesses of our past — it was in fact nothing of the sort. Moreover, the connections between orientalism, philology and antiquarianism on display in Bourke's works were not without precedent. As early as 1707 Edward Llhuyd had used philology to prove the relationship between Irish and Welsh and in 1784 Sir William Jones, speaking before the Asiatic Society in Bengal, highlighted the similarities between Sanskrit, Greek and Latin, spurring on the disciplines of both orientalism and philology.[21] In his engagement with this 'new' science Bourke trod a well-worn path.

In *Orientalism* Edward Said stressed the close links between philology and imperialist studies of the Orient while highlighting how linguistic similarities did not eschew beliefs in racial differences:

Language and race seemed inextricably tied, and the 'good' orient was

[21] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (3rd edn, London, 2003), p. 78.

> invariably a classical period somewhere in a long-gone India, whereas the 'bad' Orient lingered in present-day Asia, parts of North Africa, and Islam everywhere. 'Aryans' were confined to Europe and the ancient Orient; as Leon Poliakov has shown (without once remarking, however, that 'Semites' were not only the Jews but Muslims as well), the Aryan myth dominated historical and cultural anthropology at the expense of 'lesser' peoples.[22]

Joseph Lennon, in *Irish Orientalism*, places the work of many Irish antiquarians in an orientalist context. Lennon argues that, while British and French forms of Orientalism were used as an enabling mechanism for imperialism, Irish Orientalism viewed the Orient as another victim of British imperialism and this forms part of a long-running tradition linking Ireland to the East.[23] Lennon shows that this Irish-Oriental connection inspired cultural nationalists to create anti-imperial and cross-colonial narratives. This analysis is borne out in Bourke's work. Bourke, however, did not engage with a real or contemporary Orient. His Aryans, like those in the work of many Orientalists, existed in modern Ireland and the ancient Middle East. Bourke made no attempt to build solidarity with subjugated peoples in other parts of the British Empire. His concern was not to prove that the Irish were similar to Indians or other Asians, but rather that the age and pedigree of their civilization put them on an equal footing with the English and that they were, therefore, worthy of the same rights.

Bourke did not respond well to negative criticism and in the 1876 second edition to *Aryan Origins* he took time in the preface to deal with two reviews of the book, one positive and one negative. Bourke took pleasure in relating how 'the

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[22] Ibid., p. 99.

[23] Joseph Lennon, *Irish Orientalism: A Literary and Intellectual History* (Syracuse, 2004), pp xviii-xix.

friendly Scot' reviewing the volume in the *Keltic Magazine* felt *Aryan Origins* was 'a Keltic repository' and that Bourke's 'Keltic reading for many years being apparently thrown into a crucible, and having undergone a certain process there, are forged into the handsome volume before us.' Bourke was less pleased with the reviewer from the *Athenaeum*, a well-known and established literary journal. This critic observed astutely that Bourke's work lacked originality and that his supposed proof as to the origins of the Gaelic race and language was speculative at best. Of this less friendly but more accurate reviewer Bourke said: 'He writes with the air of the greatest scholar of the day; and strives to make his readers believe that he not only knows everything about which he writes, but that he alone is right.'[24] The irony is that Bourke's statement could very accurately apply to himself.

Where then do we situate the *Aryan Origins of the Gaelic Race and Language?* What, if any, are its merits? More importantly, what does it tell us about Bourke and his beliefs, motivations and methodologies? Bourke viewed himself as a man of science and made repeated references to the science of philology, pointing to similarities in letters and words to support his argument. However, this book is no impartial overview of language. It stands in a long tradition of the Irish, as a subject people, writing to legitimise their language, culture, and nationhood. This is highlighted by the fact that Bourke gifted a copy of *Aryan Origins* to William Gladstone, and in the second edition of *O'Gallagher's Sermons*, he reproduced Gladstone's response: 'You have done me an act of great courtesy in presenting to me a work of your own in connection with my recent visit to Ireland.'[25] While at this point Gladstone was between terms as prime minister, the presentation of *Aryan*

[24] Bourke, *Aryan Origins,* pp viii-ix.
[25] Bourke, *O'Gallagher's Sermons,* p. i.

*Origins* to him by Bourke makes literal what otherwise would have been figurative. Bourke presented his arguments on the pedigree of the Irish people and their culture, not just to themselves, but to the British establishment and attempted to vindicate their right to self-governance.

The moderate nature of Bourke's nationalism is dealt with in Chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis, but his politics related more closely to Home Rule than Fenianism. His nationalism centred on a belief that the British could be brought to legislate for self-government without resorting to force. Furthermore, his 1882 tract *A Plea for the Evicted Tenants of Mayo* (analysed in greater detail in Chapter 4), took the form of an open letter to Gladstone, prime minister at the time, and appealed to what Bourke perceived to be the more enlightened elements of British rule. His respect for Gladstone was at least in part due to Gladstone's work as a scholar. The *Aryan Origins* criticised those who deny the supremacy of God, and stated this was a modern derivation of pre-Christian Greek pantheism. Bourke cited Gladstone's Homeric works and their 'strong array of proofs in favor (sic) of the existence of God and the divinity of Christ', claiming 'he is worthy of imitation. Honest home scholars should be prepared to act a similar part.'[26] Gladstone had Bourke's respect as a scholar, statesman and Christian and it was no coincidence that Bourke placed his statement on the pedigree of the Gaelic race and language into his hands.

For Bourke the evils of paganism and atheism went hand in hand with scientific materialism, which came in for particularly venomous attack. His repeated references to the science of philology failed to engage with the fact that he himself was unskilled in science and he repeatedly failed to provide any compelling evidence for his claims. Bourke undermined his own espousals of the merits of 'science' when

[26] Bourke, *Aryan Origins*, p. 15.

he said:

> Persons professing infidel views, who follow the teaching of Darwin and Huxley, reviving in the nineteenth century of the Christian era the untenable theories of Democritus, who profess to think that matter came into being without a cause; that the harmony of the spheres is the result of atomic confusion, free from all intelligent control; that there is no spiritual power except the higher forces of material development; no soul, no free will, no hereafter, no God, are to be met in public and in private, in the saloon and railway carriage, on board a steamer, at lecture-halls, and private meetings. They are not afraid nor ashamed to put forward their views, for they have devoted years of study to the subject of their belief, or rather absence of all belief.[27]

In Bourke's opinion, churchmen should use their training to show there was no scientific foundation to the assertions of the infidels who espoused evolutionary theory, Charles Darwin and Thomas Huxley. Bourke's writing, however, was not aimed at a scientific audience. Proof that his work resonated with cultural nationalists can be seen in David Comyn's statement that *Aryan Origins* was 'very fine work, very nicely produced and though I do not agree with everything it says I have got a great deal of information from it. He, in my mind, sets at rest forever the question of the round towers and acknowledges their pagan origin.'[28]

Bourke did not feel that he was involved in an ideological project and even went so far as to include a quote from Petrie critiquing those who engaged in 'speculation, growing out of a mistaken and unphilosophical zeal in support of the

[27] Ibid., pp 13-4.
[28] Comyn to Doyle, 14 December 1875 (NLI, Comyn papers, MS 8466(3)).

claims of our country to an early civilisation.'[29] Even so, Bourke's attempt to shore up Irish origin legends against the face of the advancing historicisation of the Irish past exemplifies what Pierre Nora described as the conflict between history and memory. Memory, as portrayed by Nora, is in fact nothing of the sort, but the mediated narrative that is feared to be disappearing in the face of history. The defence of this memory leads to the creation of *lieux de memoire* or sites of memory.

> *Lieux de memoire* originate with the sense that there is no spontaneous memory, that we must deliberately create archives, maintain anniversaries, organise celebrations, pronounce eulogies, and notarise bills because such activities no longer occur naturally. The defence, by certain minorities, of a privileged memory that has retreated to jealously protected enclaves in this sense intensely illuminates the truth of *lieux de memoire*-that without commemorative vigilance, history would soon sweep them away.[30]

In essence, Burke attempted to safeguard Irish origin legends from contemporary scholarship by dressing them in its garb. New methodologies represented the history that could sweep away memory, in the form of origin legends transmitted through manuscripts. Bourke used philology as a tool to prove the validity of those memories and, therefore, to incorporate them into history. *The Aryan Origins of the Gaelic Race and Language*, represented a *lieu de memoire*, or site of memory, as does the narrative of the Knock apparition, another memory that Bourke played a role in shaping.

In between the pseudo-science and florid writing we see glimpses of Bourke's personality and beliefs. His nationalism was not born out of any great antipathy

[29] Bourke, *Aryan Origins*, p. ix.
[30] Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire', *Representations*, No. 26 (Spring, 1989), p. 12.

towards the English, as seen in the *College Irish Grammar* by his assertion that Government policy is not unsympathetic to the language, and his appeal to Gladstone in *A Plea for the Evicted Tenants of Mayo.* Bourke wanted to see Irish and English people on an equal footing inside a union where Ireland had its parliament restored. He claimed that Irish and English people are not alien as science showed they are 'of the one great Aryan family, who, thousands of years ago emigrated from Persia in the East to the most western portion of Europe, and made island homes of Eire and Britain.'[31] Here, again, Bourke deployed the word science in a manner that suited his own goals, without clarifying its meaning. He claimed the past was dead and science and technology brought people closer together and recounted how students travelled from Oxford and London to St Jarlath's to study Irish. For Bourke, this must have given hope for the revival of the language, but students travelling from places of such prestige to study Irish at his institution also raised his own profile. Bourke claimed that the

> language and literature of the Gael are, as an object of study, full of interest and profit; to Englishmen they present a two-fold advantage—first, as a new field of science, and secondly, as a medium calculated to reconcile the Anglo-Saxon with the Gael, by pointing out the identity of their Aryan origin, and thus helping to break down that wall of separation between the two races, which had been built up by ignorance, prejudice, and religious hate.[32]

Moreover, in an appendix to the second edition he included many, generally positive, reviews from a range of newspapers, including Unionist publications, with the *Belfast Newsletter* pleased to feel they had proof to refute Lord Lyndhurst's claim

[31] Bourke, *Aryan Origins.* p.3.
[32] Ibid., p. 7.

that the Irish and English were 'alien in speech, in language, and in blood.'[33] If the *Aryan Origins* was a nationalist work it was not one calculated to provoke Unionists or English people. It was, as stated, meant to elevate the status of the Irish people and prove their common ancestry with English, Scottish, and Welsh. While Bourke may have had flaws as a scholar, his commitment to the Irish language never seems to have been anything short of genuine. As outlined in Chapter 1, he made concerted efforts to promote its use and encourage its teaching. He felt the language could assist Irish people in their quest for nationhood and saw it as central to their identity. Yet, while a cultural nationalist, he also saw in the Irish language the ability to harmonise relations between nationalist and unionist, and English and Irish.

## Myth and History

Bourke did not simply invent the material contained in his works, it derived from a number of sources including mythology, manuscripts and the works of scholars such as Eugene O'Curry, Geoffrey Keating and Professor R.W. Blackie of the University of Edinburgh. Bourke referenced Blackie with particular frequency. Blackie had visited St Jarlath's and spent time with Bourke and by stressing Blackie's credentials Bourke sought to elevate himself. The irony is that Blackie had visited Tuam to see John MacHale, but MacHale was absent.[34] Bourke compiled information from his various sources, dressed it up in a pseudo-scientific version of philology and attempted to create a narrative of prehistoric Ireland that reconciled biblical, mythological, and manuscript accounts with contemporary scholarship.

Bourke's works lacked any delineation between myth and historical fact. He

[33] Ibid., 'Opinions of the Press'.
[34] Ibid., p. 51.

treated manuscripts as reliable sources and justified this by stating:

> In regard to all historic accounts, such as those of battles, handed down to the present time in our national manuscripts and penned generally by Ollamhs or professional teachers in Ireland, it must be remembered, that there existed a most stringent law requiring those Ollamhs to tell the truth and nothing but the truth, and if it were found that they had invented, or did tell what were not facts, they were directly deprived of all their privileges for life.[35]

*Pre-Christian Ireland*, published shortly before Bourke's death, is much more accessible than *Aryan Origins,* principally because it is shorter — approximately 200 pages compared to the 600 pages of *Aryan Origins* — but also because it deals predominantly with mythology and is less tangential. Although presenting mythology as history, it confines itself to its subject matter and is better structured and edited than *Aryan Origins*. In this work Bourke condensed Irish mythology and origin legends into an accessible and chronological format while presenting it as fact. References to Petrie, O'Donovan, and O'Curry abound and Bourke made explicit the connections between archaeological monuments and the legendary races who supposedly created them.[36] Basing his thesis on Gaelic manuscripts and subsequent interpretations of them, Bourke claimed that there had been four major settlements of Celtic people in Ireland. The first of these, the Fomorians, received the least treatment, but the three subsequent waves of settlement, the Firbolg, the Tuatha de Danann, and the Milesians he described as 'great races.'[37] According to Bourke, the Tuatha de Danann were master builders responsible for the construction of most archaeological monuments in Ireland, including the 'Grianan or Palace of Aileach'

[35] Ulick Bourke, *Pre-Christian Ireland* (Dublin, 1887), p. 29.
[36] Ibid., p. 75.
[37] Ibid., p. 187.

the ‘Cities of the Dead’ at Knowth, Dowth and Newgrange and possibly the round towers.[38] Bourke made the strange assertion that ‘the fact that the Round Towers were built is certain; uncertain, by whom, or when first erected. The former is matter of history; of opinion the latter.’[39]

This does not mean that Bourke did not qualify the information presented in his writing. The chapters and sections of *Pre-Christian Ireland* were presented as a series of rhetorical questions, as though emanating from a reader or student, and responses to them. To present everything in Gaelic legend as true, including the supernatural element, would have challenged orthodox Catholicism. Bourke conceded that historians and antiquarians regarded the heroes and heroines of the Gaelic races as demigods and goddesses and he gave the equivalent of the Irish gods in other languages and traditions.[40] While this had the potential to undermine the veracity of the legends by exposing them as supernatural myth, Bourke asserted that historical events can be shrouded in myth and myth can contain a kernel of truth.[41] It is certain that Rome was founded, he says, but this does not mean its foundation myth is true. Bourke claimed that data from monuments, comparative philology and the names of families and places attested to their Danann origins.[42] Myth and legend were historical fact when it suited Bourke’s own agenda or preconceived ideas, but were less so when they challenged them. Bourke cited Blackie as saying that, within reason, a legend should not be discounted as having a grain of truth simply because it incorporated supernatural elements.[43]

Bourke claimed that the Tuatha de Danann had knowledge of letters and used

[38] Ibid., p. 83.
[39] Ibid., p. 79.
[40] Ibid., p. 64.
[41] Ibid., p. 65.
[42] Ibid., p. 66.
[43] Ibid., p. 68.

the ogham alphabet. This portrayal of pre-Christian Irish civilisation as literate and learned reinforced its pedigree. He mocked the idea that the Vikings brought learning to Ireland or that 'the Danes came in their marauding masses to enlighten and civilise by the torch and sword'.[44] This motif of the marauding Danes surfaces several times in Bourke's work. It signified a difference between the civilised Celts who came to Ireland in their various waves of settlement and the barbarous hordes who came later, beginning with the Vikings. As with the round towers Bourke acknowledged that there was a difference of opinion regarding whether ogham was Christian or pre-Christian in origin, but he felt confident in the veracity of his opinion. Subsequent scholarship has shown both the round towers and ogham to be Christian in origin, demonstrating that Bourke swam against the tide of contemporary scholarship despite his pretence to a scientific approach. Gladstone and the Rev. G.W. Cox influenced Bourke's views on the origins of mythology and he claimed that it developed as:

> Man lost sight of the Creator and deified the creature. This is St Paul's explanation: 'The invisible things of God, his wisdom, power, providence, and Divine nature, which are clearly seen from the works of creation that surround us,' they did not see, but took without reasoning, influenced by passion or fancy the things created for the Creator. 'They changed the glory of the incorruptible God into the likeness of the image of a corruptible man, and of birds, and of four-footed beasts, and of creeping things.'

In this 'dimmed and untutored state' mankind was prone to attach the qualities of God to kings and heroes.[45]

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[44] Ibid., p. 90.
[45] Ibid., p. 115.

As had been the fate of the Fomorians and the Firbolg, the Tuatha de Danann were eventually defeated by a better-armed and trained group from the south, the Milesians. In recounting this wave of colonisation Bourke demonstrated his ability to use sources selectively to construct a national narrative: 'The Milesian colonisation of Ireland is one thing, the record of it by the historians and Keltic bards is another. The colonisation may be true, and is true, while the account of it may be quite untrue.'[46] Bourke recounted in considerable detail the invasion that occurred and the ultimate triumph of the Milesians. He presented as historical fact, over a number of chapters, a story of battles and royal succession, which carried on to the advent of Christianity. Central to this portrayal of the Gaelic past was the idea of a centralised form of government headed by a high king, who presided over a system where the clan was the central social unit and the Brehon laws governed society.

## Law

Orientalists and antiquarians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries devoted considerable attention to the study of ancient legal systems, as evidenced by Jakob Grimm's investigations into Germanic law and Jones' studies of Sanskrit law. Bourke was no exception to this and, as well as using language, monuments, and legend to prove the ancient pedigree of the Gaelic people, he used his interpretations of Brehon law to reinforce his argument. According to Bourke, 'the Brehon Law was that code by which the Irish race, in pagan and in Christian times, had been governed. It is, as shall be shown, the twin sister of the Roman code, known as the Laws of the Twelve Tables. It is of Aryan origin.'[47] Therefore Brehon law, Roman

[46] Ibid., p. 127.
[47] Bourke, *Aryan Origins,* p. 433.

law, and English law shared a common origin.[48] He believed being Aryan in origin made it equal, if not superior to the law of all other great ancient European civilisations. Bourke compared Brehon law to Pompeii, frozen under a layer of ash, or a fossil, due to its preservation in old Irish.[49] He asserted that, as Ireland was never a part of the Roman Empire, its laws remained unadulterated and, as a result, Brehon law, like Hindu law, had remained intact as a development of Aryan code law.[50]

Bourke attempted to give a sense, not only of the ancient pedigree of the Irish past, but of the integrity of the Irish people who, despite being descended from different waves of Celtic settlers, had for thousands of years existed under a system presided over by a centralised authority, a high king. The implication is that the Irish were just as civilised as the English, who in the nineteenth century viewed themselves as masters of jurisprudence and synonymous with law and order. Therefore the Irish had no need of English guidance. Bourke conceded that the Brehon laws may now look archaic, but he claimed: 'This fossil condition of Ireland's ancient law, morally speaking, is owing to four causes—the insular position of Ireland, its freedom from Imperial Rome, the antagonism of Britain and of British Law, the love of the Keltic race to preserve traditional usages.' If Irish civilisation was not widely known it was because Brehon law, like an ancient artefact sealed in a tomb, had been sealed in the Irish language.[51] By implication then, the Irish language held the key to Ireland's glorious, self-governing past.

[48] Bourke, *Pre-Christian Ireland*, p. 180.
[49] Bourke, *Aryan Origins*, p. 437.
[50] Ibid., p. 440.
[51] Bourke, *Pre-Christian Ireland*, pp 180-1.

## Round Towers

According to Joep Leerson, ‘the single most interesting litmus test for a historian’s or archaeologist’s beliefs concerning the nature of the Irish past was his treatment of the round towers.'[52] Bourke stated: ‘There is no subject just now in the literary field before men of learning and thought in Ireland, and before men of no learning, and the mere unthinking, yet reading public, so full of knotty and apparently contradictory views as that relating to the ancient towers of Ireland.’[53] George Petrie's seminal 1832 essay on the topic for the Royal Irish Academy was an important step in bringing Irish antiquarianism from a soup of biblical lore, mythology and conjecture on to a more solid archaeological footing. Bourke, however, felt that he had better evidence than Petrie as 'the light derived from the science of comparative philology sheds on the early history of the Irish race. The early Irish were Aryan, therefore they were a race possessed of skill and power to erect those Towers.'[54] Modern scholarship was in the process of dispensing with Irish origin legends but Bourke insisted that his ‘philological’ approach had more scientific and academic merit than the physical evidence of archaeology.

Petrie had shown that round towers were Christian in origin, but for many the topic was not settled. His work, along with that of O'Donovan and O'Curry, had been fundamental in advancing archaeological investigation with a firm empirical basis. Bourke, however, did not express a wilful ignorance of the present state of knowledge on the towers; rather, he tried to reconcile archaeological evidence with his own view of Irish origin legends by positing a compromise view. He pointed out that the period of their construction was uncertain and that nobody was quite sure of

[52] Leerson, *Remembrance and Imagination,* p. 108.
[53] Bourke, *Aryan Origins*, p. 343.
[54] Ibid., p. ix.

their purpose.[55] Bourke outlined three widely held views as to the origins of the towers: first, that the Vikings built them; second, that they were built in the early Christian period; and third, that they were of pagan origin. Bourke's own view was a synthesis of the second and third theories, 'that the Round Towers were first built in the early Pagan period by those of the Aryan race' but that St Patrick had converted them to Christian use.[56] Bourke felt that as 'all the Aryan nations were skilled in the sciences and arts, especially those of architecture, sculpture, dyeing, and painting', there was a strong case to be made for their pre-Christian origins.[57]

In essence Bourke tried to build a bridge between two opposing schools of thought on the round towers. The first of these, the Romantic school, included the likes of Charles Vallancey, active a century earlier, and Bourke's own contemporary Marcus Keane, for whose writing he had a particular distaste. Bourke's objections to Keane were particularly virulent on the subject of which of Noah's progeny the Celts descended from. He chastised Keane for suggesting that Cuthites (descendants of Noah's son Ham) had built the round towers, as Bourke believed that the Celts had descended from Gomor, the eldest son of Noah's son Japheth.[58] Bourke's opposition to Keane was not based on the absurdity of the proposition that entire races descended from separate sons or grandsons of Noah, or that the Irish people were Celts who had migrated en masse to Ireland from the Middle East via the Mediterranean. His problem lay with the fact that Keane identified the wrong son, which, in Bourke's view, meant he wrongly attributed the Celts as having a Phoenician (modern Lebanon) rather than Carthaginian (modern Tunisia) origin. Bourke believed, generally, the waves of migration as outlined in the *Lebor Gabála*

[55] Ibid., p. 345.
[56] Ibid., p. 345.
[57] Ibid., p. 382.
[58] Ibid., p. 346.

*Érenn*, but felt that every one of these waves of migrants was Celtic and all could trace their lineage back to Japheth. By stressing that all settlers in Ireland were Celts, Bourke presented a unity of ancestry for all Irish people and, furthermore, it allowed him to accept every possible migratory route for the Celts. Bourke claimed that Keane's book had no plan and was rambling, an objection with which anybody who reads the entire six hundred pages of the *Aryan Origins* can sympathise. Bourke refuted the claim that the Danes built the round towers and asserted that they were never fully established in Ireland and that no round towers existed in Scandinavia.

The disdain in which Bourke held Keane contrasts to the esteem in which he held Petrie, the chief proponent of the opposing, positivist school of thought on the towers. Bourke did not agree with Petrie's thesis that the towers were Christian in origin and he attributed this view to Petrie's ignorance of philology. Had Petrie been aware of philology, Bourke felt, he would have realised the pre-Christian origins of the towers. Bourke claimed that while Petrie could not have been certain that the Irish were skilled in the sciences and arts prior to the advent of Christianity, philology demonstrated their Aryan origins. He claimed that the Aryan ancestry of the Celts made it possible to extrapolate that they shared these skills. Moreover, Bourke felt the architectural style of the towers mirrored styles found in 'Etruria, Mycenae, Thebes, Persepolis' and 'along the Nile.'[59] Similarly, Bourke spoke with high regard of O'Curry and O'Donovan despite frequently standing in opposition to them. Indeed, he praised how well Petrie made his argument and said that he had once agreed with it but the fullness of time had made him see its errors.[60] However, he simultaneously criticised Petrie's use of 'negative proofs' and said that his

[59] Ibid., p.357.
[60] Ibid., p. 359.

argument did not follow a logical sequence. Bourke claimed that while Petrie had disproved some of the arguments in favour of the pagan origins of the towers it did not mean they were Christian.[61] He also criticised Petrie's assertion that no record existed of their construction in pre-Christian times by pointing out that no record existed for Christian times either. Bourke felt Irish people in the Christian period lacked the skill to build round towers and, as they were under attack by the Vikings, they would not have had the opportunity to do so. In *Pre-Christian Ireland* Bourke reiterated his theory regarding the round towers, but conceded that some, based on an earlier pagan design, may have been built in the Christian period.[62]

## Conclusion

Like many who examine the past, Bourke sought not so much to develop a perfect understanding as to what had gone before as to project his own ideals backwards. He stated of earlier Gaelic civilisations that

> the ancient laws and the ancient language of Ireland tell that the early inhabitants of Ireland had a knowledge of the arts and sciences; of the laws of social life; that woman was held in respect, and marriage declared honourable; that they had a government, partly monarchical and partly republican.[63]

Bourke highlighted the role Irish monasteries played in keeping the flame of civilisation ablaze in Europe in the dark ages, and even claimed that Irish had been the language most utilised inside the English-dominated pale through the sixteenth century and that 'up to the first quarter of the present nineteenth century, the peasant

[61] Ibid., p. 366.
[62] Bourke, *Pre-Christian Ireland*, p. 199.
[63] Bourke, *Aryan Origins,* p. 25.

population spoke their native tongue with the same sweetness and grammatical excellence with which it was spoken in 1631, when the Four Masters penned the annals of Ireland.'[64] Bourke's conception of Irish culture and identity was all-encompassing, incorporating language, religion and origin legends. In constructing his narratives, he tended to be selective in his use of evidence and to shape the narrative into a form that suited his preconceptions. He felt his works had the ability to influence both Irish people's attitude to the Irish language and their heritage, and the opinions of the outside world, principally the English elite, in their attitudes to Ireland. For Bourke to put pen to paper was to wage an ideological battle and to perpetuate his own worldview. All of this would have a bearing on Bourke's role in creating and disseminating the narrative of the Knock apparition.

[64] Ibid., p. 28.

# Chapter 3: On the Militant Side of Moderate - Religion, Politics, and Education

Ideas of Irish identity are often associated with the Catholic faith. Attempts to Anglicise Ireland had, since the Reformation, involved attempts to undermine this faith so, perhaps, it was only natural that Irish Catholics came to look on their faith as an important expression of identity. The Established Church was, after all, the Anglican Church. The Catholic Church, for its part, eagerly nurtured this conflation of religious and national feeling. Although it may seem that the Catholic Church stood to benefit significantly from independence or self-government for Ireland, most of its seeming nationalist actions were grounded in pragmatism and self-interest and it expressed opposition to militant nationalism. The relationship of the Church to the British government, particularly regarding education, could at times seem confrontational. However, any confrontation resulted from the Church attempting to defend and advance its own position, rather than a broader nationalist project. The previous two chapters have focused on Ulick Bourke's cultural nationalism and his role in shaping and defining identity. These activities reflected his individual interests rather than the priorities of the Catholic Church. As shown in Chapter 1, clerics had little enthusiasm for the language revival in its early stages and Bourke himself lamented their lack of commitment to keeping the language alive. Bourke was not just in the vanguard of clergy who embraced the language revival, he stood at the vanguard of the movement generally, and his writings demonstrate his particular ideas on Irish national identity. They also highlight his moderation, his disdain for the upheaval of social order, and his belief in the more enlightened elements of British rule.

This thesis contends that the threat to clerical authority posed by the secular leadership of the land movement provided Bourke with an incentive to shape the narrative of the Knock apparition, in order to encourage religious devotion and reaffirm religious identity in the minds of the people. Shifts in devotional practice occurred in Ireland after the Famine and brought the Catholic Church to a positon of considerable power by 1879. Chapter 4 will deal with the Land War and Bourke's role in it. In order to understand why the Church reacted to the Land War in the way it did it is necessary to detail the position of the Catholic Church in 1879, its attitudes to politics and the precedents for clerical involvement in politics in the archdiocese of Tuam. Bourke's political viewpoints manifested themselves in his roles as writer, cleric, educator, and a participant in what we now call civil society. The Church agenda most frequently found expression in the field of education and Bourke too served as an agent of this policy.

Apart from his time at Maynooth, Ulick Bourke lived his entire life in the archdiocese of Tuam. Archbishop John MacHale dominated this diocese from 1834 until his death in 1881. He cut an imposing figure and many considered him the quintessential nationalist bishop. From 1850 Paul Cullen, first as an archbishop and later as cardinal, had a profound impact on the operation of the Catholic Church in Ireland and he eventually came to be MacHale's bitter rival. Cullen was seen to lack the nationalist credentials of MacHale and was at times even referred to as a 'castle bishop'; that is, a bishop on good terms with, or sympathetic to, the British administration in Dublin Castle.[1] Emmet Larkin has advanced a narrative that presents the conflict between MacHale and Cullen as one between Gallicanism and

[1] Emmet Larkin, *The Making of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland, 1850-60* (Chapel Hill, 1980), p. 202.

Ultramontanism, or between a decentralised church that exercised regional autonomy and an organisation tightly controlled by Rome. There is a grain of truth to this, but it presents a rigid dichotomy that fails to capture the complexity of the relationship between Cullen and MacHale. Despite opposition from MacHale, Cullen enjoyed considerable success in centralising church authority in Ireland. The appointment of John MacEvilly, an ally of Cullen's, as MacHale's coadjutor bishop in 1876 further undermined MacHale's authority and had a profound impact on the operations of the archdiocese of Tuam at the time of the Knock apparition and the Land War.

Memories of the French Revolution, with its fervent anti-clericalism and destruction of the established order, hung over Catholic interpretations of the politics of the nineteenth century. Furthermore, Italian nationalism in the nineteenth century led to direct conflict with the pope as those intent on forging a united Italian nation sought to wrest the Papal States from pontifical control. Paul Cullen, as rector of the Irish College, was in Rome during the 1848 rebellion and had a deeply ingrained opposition to Italian nationalism and republicanism. The renewed Italian nationalist fervour of the 1850s and '60s led Irish people to subscribe to funds to support the pope against the Italian people, with some even joining a brigade to defend the Papal States. This effort was unsuccessful and the pope lost his territories in the wake of Italian unification. These events took place against the backdrop of the growing secularism of the nineteenth century. The Church found its authority challenged in a number of European countries, which felt that their citizens' first loyalty should be to the state rather than to a powerful transnational organisation. The Paris Commune of 1871 provoked renewed anxiety for the clergy in the face of Godless communism. This poses the question as to what degree fear of continental secularism influenced the Catholic Church in Ireland and whether their flock shared these concerns. This

chapter analyses the attitudes of the Church to secularism in Ireland, their response to it, and Bourke's position within this. Ulick Bourke may well have been a nationalist but, as is highlighted here, he abhorred radicalism and his fear of secularism and class-based conflict shaped his approach to both the Land War and the Knock apparition.

## The 'Devotional Revolution'

Emmet Larkin's seminal 1972 article, 'The Devotional Revolution in Ireland', outlines a dramatic shift in religious practice in Ireland in the third quarter of the nineteenth century.[2] He describes a situation where mass attendance increased significantly, devotion became regularised, and the ratio of priests to people grew. Larkin bookends the era between the Synod of Thurles in 1850 and the Synod of Maynooth in 1875. Paul Cullen was transferred from Rome and appointed Archbishop of Armagh and apostolic delegate, or pope's representative, in 1850, Archbishop of Dublin in 1852 and in 1866 he became the first Irish cardinal. According to Larkin, Cullen reformed the Irish Church and in the process he 'spearheaded the consolidation of a devotional revolution. The great mass of the Irish people became practising Catholics, which they have uniquely and essentially remained both at home and abroad down to the present day.'[3] While Catholics were barred from most political positions until Catholic Emancipation in 1829, the dismantling of the penal laws between 1774 and 1793 lifted most restrictions on religious observance. Larkin asserts that, despite the end of these restrictions, the

[2] Emmet Larkin 'The Devotional Revolution in Ireland, 1850-75', *The American Historical Review,* Vol. 77, No. 3 (June, 1972), pp 625-52.
[3] Ibid., p. 625.

Church lacked the resources to regularise religious practice. However, the reduction in population brought about by the Famine meant that the ratio of priests to people changed significantly. Paul Cullen's tenure coincided with this changed post-Famine dynamic. In Larkin's view, these two factors allowed the devotional revolution to shape a desire for regularisation of practice that had arisen from an Irish identity crisis. This took place in the lifetime of Ulick Bourke and, in his biography of MacHale, Bourke reminisced about attending mass at the gable end of a house as a child and, as a young priest, administering communion in the market-square in Headford, County Galway. [4]

Larkin states that Cullen 'derived very great advantage from the psychological impact the Famine had on those who remained in Ireland.' A fear of acting sinfully and incurring God's wrath compounded this fear. Thus, Larkin believes, the Irish people were 'psychologically and socially' prepared for a great revival while the Church was 'economically and organizationally' prepared to administer it.[5] He rejects as simplistic the idea that guilt and terror evoked by the Famine led to a greater level of religious devotion. He argues that the supplanting of Gaelic culture by the English language created a devotional need that the church could not meet prior to the famine as it lacked the resources. According to Larkin, the slow erasure of the Irish language and culture meant 'the Irish were being effectively Anglicised, or, perhaps more appropriately, West-Britonised.' The devotional revolution therefore provided the Irish people with 'a substitute symbolic language and offered them a new cultural heritage.'[6] Following the population reduction brought about by the Famine, and the improved priest to people ratio, the

[4] Bourke, *Life and Times of Archbishop MacHale*, pp 28-9.
[5] Larkin, 'Devotional Revolution', p. 639.
[6] Ibid., p. 649.

Church took on a cultural as well as a religious leadership role.[7] In essence, an identity crisis led to a religious revival.

Though this argument has merit, it inaccurately dichotomises identity as being expressed by either language or religion, but not both simultaneously. Ulick Bourke demonstrated the intertwining of different expressions of Irish identity and felt that 'our language and our literature constitute our special national life.'[8] He also outlined the role that clergy played in the preservation of Irish language and culture, in particular, Brother Míchael Ó Cléirigh and his associates, Cú Choigcríche Ó Cléirigh, Peregrine Ó Duibhgeannain, and Fearfassa Ó Maol Chonaire, collectively known as the Four Masters, whose *Annals* were compiled in the early seventeenth century. Bourke highlighted not just the individual commitment of the clerics involved in this work but the networks of support that ecclesiastical institutions provided. He made the connection between Irish culture and the divine explicit in his statement that '*The Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland,* thus preserving as in a sacred shrine, the glory of the past, that in the morning of peace and prosperity its golden beams, like the sacred fire of the Holy Temple, might serve once again to enlighten and gladden the sons of Inisfail.' According to Bourke, monasteries had been central to the earliest stages of Irish literary endeavour; they 'were the centres of Irish-Gaelic lore and learning' prior to the advent of universities.[9] The Church, through its monks, was the originator of literary tradition in Ireland and responsible for the production and reproduction of most manuscripts in the early middle ages. Scholarly pursuits, religion, and the Irish language and culture had been inseparable. For

[7] David W. Miller, 'Irish Catholicism and the Great Famine', *Journal of Social History,* Vol. 9, No. 1 (Autumn, 1975), p. 83.
[8] Bourke, *Aryan Origins*, p. 7.
[9] Bourke, *Aryan Origins*, pp 22 and 25.

Bourke, the Catholic Church should not supplant Gaelic culture, but complement it. He felt the decline of the Irish language had to be prevented as it was the crucible which contained Gaelic culture. Monks and monasteries had preserved the written form of this language and, in Bourke's view, he merely carried on this tradition. Indeed in his preface to *O'Gallagher's Sermons* he referred to the way in which the work of scribes such as Míchael Ó Cléirigh had preserved in writing the lives of great men, and he felt that he did the same for O'Gallagher.[10]

Quantitative data from both David Miller and Larkin supports the idea that a transformation of religious practice occurred after the Famine, but Miller believes that this data fails to capture peasant religious practices. Miller contends that the failure of crops during the Famine caused Irish people to lose faith in traditional customs and turn to more formulaic religious practice. He believed that the 'typical peasant' was more likely to feel anxiety over the prospect of a landless existence than the loss of the Irish language or other aspects of Gaelic culture.[11] Devotional tools such as rosary beads and prayer books reinforced newly popularised religious practices. These items were often blessed by priests, bestowing on them the appearance of possessing supernatural powers. Furthermore, new sodalities and confraternities sought to 'communalise and regularise practice under a spiritual director.' [12] Despite Miller's belief that the causes of the devotional revolution were material rather than cultural, his argument highlights that its outcome was as much cultural as religious. The social and religious change the devotional revolution

[10] Bourke, *O'Gallagher's Sermons*, p. vii.
[11] Miller, 'Irish Catholicism', pp 83 and 93.
[12] Larkin, 'Devotional Revolution', p. 645.

brought about gave new authority to the clergy and helped conflate religious and national identity.

Thomas G. McGrath took considerable exception to the Devotional Revolution thesis and claimed Larkin only 'put forward impressionistic evidence of the corporate quality of the priests on the pre-famine mission' and that the criticisms levelled by Larkin more accurately applied to a minority of clergy rather than the general population of priests.[13] He also disputed that most people never attended mass or had access to sacraments. Yet, despite his criticisms of Larkin, McGrath arrives at the conclusion that 'though there was recognition of the importance and centrality of the Mass, religion as expressed in the lives of the people was not markedly church-centred. McGrath feels that rather than a devotional revolution Larkin is merely reporting on the 'tail-end of the Tridentine renewal', a centuries long reorganisation of the Catholic Church, which was accelerated by the famine. [14] In highlighting the role of the famine in regularising devotion McGrath is more in agreement with Larkin than he admits. In response in *The Pastoral Role of the Roman Catholic Church in Pre-Famine Ireland* Larkin provided substantial quantitative and qualitative evidence that prior to the famine the ratio of priests to people was low, the quality of priests poor and the vast majority of devotion popular.[15]

Eugene Hynes has branded Larkin's argument a top-down approach with an overemphasis on modernisation theory and claims that the sources he utilised

[13] Thomas G. McGrath, 'The Tridentine Evolution of Modern Irish Catholicism, 1563-1962: A Re-examination of the "Devotional Revolution" Thesis.' *Recusant History*, Vol. 20, No. 4, (October 1991), p. 515.
[14] Ibid., p. 520
[15] Emmet Larkin, *The Pastoral Role of the Cathlic Church in Pre-Famine Ireland 1750 – 1850*, (Dublin, 2006).

originated primarily with the clergy and, therefore, overlook popular devotion.'[16] In the early 1970s, over 90 per cent of Irish Catholics attended Mass every Sunday. David Miller's 1976 article demonstrated that this figure was considerably lower in 1834. There was variance in attendance between areas, but overall the average varied between 30 and 40 per cent.[17] Larkin connected Miller's figures to his own data on 'plant and personnel' and said there were not enough priests and churches to accommodate those who wished to attend Mass.[18] Hynes highlights other work that shows that while Mass attendance did increase post-Famine there was less onus on Mass attendance as a 'touchstone of faith' prior to the Famine.[19] Furthermore, Hynes asserts that the people's failure to attend Mass, or their tendency to practice their religion in a more traditional manner, did not mean they shunned belief. Prior to the devotional revolution, in order to offset the lack of resources, the clergy made use of stations (the celebration of Mass in the houses of parishioners), and the sacraments of baptism and marriage were also frequently celebrated in private homes rather than in churches. Critics of this practice opposed the exorbitant fees the clergy charged for these services, as well as the unholy setting for the sacraments. All provincial and national Synods between 1830 and 1875 issued statutes disapproving of stations and eventually Rome proscribed them, although the practice survived in some parts of Ireland into the twentieth century. Regardless of their interpretations, all writers agree that in the post-Famine era there existed a higher ratio of priests to people, higher levels of Mass attendance, more churches, and faith, to a large degree,

[16] Hynes, *Knock*, p. 107.
[17] Miller, 'Irish Catholicism', pp 83-6.
[18] Larkin, 'Devotional Revolution', p. 636.
[19] Hynes, *Knock*, p. 103.

became standardised. This standardisation of practice placed priests and churches at the centre of social, as well as religious, life.

For Bourke, this regularisation of practice represented the triumph of the Catholic Church and its recovery from the Penal period. In his view, folk religious practice kept the faith alive in the face of oppression. The Penal period, he maintained, was a time of 'great trial and tribulation for all who then professed the Catholic faith in this country.' He believed it was not just detrimental to the Catholic faith, but to the Irish language and literature, as the clergy were dispersed and prevented from teaching. Indeed, when Bourke spoke of the Penal period he conjoined the suppression of the Catholic religion with the suppression of the Irish language. The people, he claimed, suffered 'at the hands of an infuriate and a bigoted soldiery, wild with lawless desire of plunder and lucre, and maddened with a religious fanaticism.' Bourke rationalised the suffering of this period by saying that after eleven centuries of devotion the Irish Catholics had been given this test to show to the world 'the depth of their devotedness to God, and of the strength of their faith in Christ.'[20] Bourke drew parallels to the persecution earlier Christians suffered from pagan oppressors. He highlighted folk practice as part of the resilience of the faith of Irish people and stated that during the Penal period

> the local clergy blessed the marriage and administered baptism in the houses of the people, and on Sundays celebrated Mass on the hill-side, under the shadow of a projecting cliff, or in the dry-bed of some meandering stream. Of the generation of Irish men still living, many have witnessed liturgical and devotional administrations such as those, performed by the people's clergy.[21]

[20] Bourke, *O'Gallagher's Sermons*, pp ix-xix.
[21] Bourke, *Life and Times of MacHale*, p. 29.

In connecting the prohibition of the Catholic faith to attempts to discourage the use of the Irish language, Bourke claimed that it was more dangerous for an Irishman to be found with a Gaelic manuscript in the penal period than for him to be found in possession of firearms in a proclaimed district under a Coercion Act of the late nineteenth century. He highlighted the exclusion of Irish from the national school system as detrimental to the language, in the same way that the schools hurt the Catholic faith by their exclusion of Catholic catechism. He claimed 'the penal power of the law has ceased… but exclusion of Irish from the national schools of Ireland destroys the language in the cradle of our national hopes.' The national school system thus exercised a soft power to suppress Irish culture where previously attempts had been more blatant. For Bourke, the questions of education, language, and religion were interconnected and he claimed that penal laws prohibiting priests and teachers from teaching had also harmed the language. Bourke credited John MacHale with these views and in *Aryan Origins* reproduced a letter from MacHale to Professor Blackie, dated 3 July 1874, in which MacHale opined: 'When you reflect that under every form, whether written or oral, the Irish language was banned under the severest penalties, and all Irish and Catholic teachers doomed as felons to transportation, you will not be surprised that the Irish youth could not then read or write their own language.'[22] For Bourke and MacHale, the twin assaults on language and religion undermined Irish culture.

The lifting of the Penal Laws allowed the Catholic religion to revive and move from outdoor or secret sacraments to an organised religion with its own churches. Education too was permitted, but state-sanctioned education sought to eradicate the Irish language, not through an outright assault, but through exclusion.

[22] Bourke, *Aryan Origins*, pp 38, 42, 63, and 64-5.

Bourke felt the language had to be taught in national schools for it to survive. In Bourke's view at least, the devotional revolution, as it was later called, was not a substitute for a lost language or culture, it represented the re-emergence of suppressed practices. His work in the Irish language revival was an effort to help the language recover as religion had. The language and the faith were not mutually exclusive; they closely intertwined. S.J. Connolly describes Emmet Larkin's article on the devotional revolution as an impressionist overview, which is 'schematic in conception and somewhat bombastic in tone'. Connolly maintains that the argument that Catholic devotion served as a replacement for the loss of the Irish language or discredited rituals is 'impossibly crude' and points to factors that could have led to a desire for greater devotional regularisation. These include the rapid commercialisation that occurred after the famine and Connolly suggests that this, combined with the disappearance of 'a whole body of traditional custom', led to a sense of social dislocation. This dislocation led people to search for new symbols of identity, as evidenced by the appearance of cultural nationalist organisations in the later nineteenth century.[23]

In 1983 when *The Invention of Tradition*, edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger, emerged, Hobsbawm succinctly articulated its argument on the opening page: '"Traditions" which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin or sometimes invented.' He argued that certain practices were used by elites to inculcate values and 'where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past.'[24] The same year saw the publication of *Imagined*

[23] S.J. Connolly, 'Cardinal Cullen's other capital: Belfast and the "devotional revolution"' in Dáire Keogh and Albert McDonnell (eds), *Cardinal Paul Cullen and his World* (Dublin, 2011) pp 289 and 295. *Priests and People in Pre-Famine Ireland 1780 – 1845* (Dublin, 1982).
[24] Eric Hobsbawm, 'Inventing Traditions', in Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 1.

*Communities* in which Benedict Anderson argued that literacy and the proliferation of print media had helped to forge national identities and create a shared sense of nationality amongst people who had no other way to interact.[25] Both of these works challenge the assumptions of nationalism. In the intervening decades the certainty of the assertions of these writers has drawn criticism, but some of their points remain pertinent. Ulick Bourke portrayed continuity in Irish national identity. He dealt with language, laws, folklore and religion in a manner that stressed the pedigree of the Irish people and nation. Moreover, he did this in a literary form and, despite writing some of his works in Irish, he primarily transmitted his message through English. Whether or not the devotional revolution represents an invented tradition, regulation of devotion was a reality by the late 1870s. Bourke embraced the change and saw it as the Catholic Church emerging from a period of oppression. He believed the Irish language too had to be nurtured in order for it to regain a position of prestige.

Hynes' rebuttal of the devotional revolution thesis is central to his framing of the Knock apparition. By portraying continuity in religious folk practice he categorises Knock alongside stations, patterns and holy wells. He, therefore, claims that its ultramontane appearance was one imposed on it by the clergy. The imagery and nature of the apparition were such that, at least in the final version, they in no way contravened contemporary practices. Thus pilgrimages to Knock gained the appearance of regularised devotion that corresponded to similar sites on mainland Europe. This thesis supports the idea that the clergy put an ultramontane appearance on the Knock apparition but contends that Hynes seriously underestimates the role of Bourke. Furthermore, while he does focus on folklore, the devotional revolution, and

[25] Benedict Anderson, *Imagine Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (2nd edn, New York, 1991).

the Land War, Hynes does not engage with cultural nationalism is any meaningful way.

## The Ecclesiastical Politics of the Archdiocese of Tuam

While standardisation of practice had occurred in the Irish church, the continued influence of John MacHale in Tuam made it somewhat anomalous. Tuam is the largest diocese in Ireland and incorporates large sections of Galway and Mayo, while the metropolitan province of Tuam incorporates most of Connaught. Archbishop John MacHale has been referred to variously as the Lion of the West, the Lion of Tuam, or, more grandly, 'The Lion of the Fold of Judah', a name that Daniel O'Connell apparently bestowed on him. Ulick Bourke produced two biographies of MacHale, one in English, and an Irish version serialised in the *Gaelic Journal*. Both of these biographies were short as Bourke lacked sources, despite having known MacHale personally for decades. When John MacEvilly assumed control of the archdiocese, MacHale's nephew, Thomas MacHale, who had been his Vicar General and preferred candidate as his replacement, returned to the Irish College in Paris. He took the vast majority of documents relating to MacHale's tenure with him. Thomas MacHale entrusted these materials to an Irish-American priest named Bernard O'Reilly who produced a two-volume biography of MacHale, which appeared in 1890. MacHale's papers have not been located since, despite the efforts of several historians, and his successors as archbishop. A perception has arisen that Thomas MacHale removed anything of significance from the diocese, but, as detailed in the following chapter, I uncovered extensive records of estates owned by MacHale,

which prove that he was a landlord and bring considerable clarity to his reaction to the Land War.

MacHale, the first wholly Irish-educated bishop since the sixteenth century, commenced his studies at Maynooth in 1807. In January 1825 he was appointed coadjutor bishop in the diocese of Killala. At this time the fight for Catholic emancipation was advancing but MacHale played no leadership role in the campaign as, according to Bourke, he preferred to give counsel rather than leadership. After nearly a decade as coadjutor in Killala, MacHale became Archbishop of Tuam in 1834 and occupied the position until his death in 1881. MacHale was a friend of Daniel O'Connell and made common cause with him on a number of popular issues, ranging from Catholic emancipation to opposition to tithes. Although he lent vocal support to issues such as tenant right and Repeal, MacHale showed the greatest enthusiasm on issues that directly impacted on religion and publicly expressed his opposition to tithes, proselytism, and secularism. He was most vocal on the topic of education. Questions of education were never regarded in isolation and MacHale saw the schools administered by the Protestant Kildare Place Society, the national school system, the intermediate education system, the Queen's Colleges, and proselytism all as part of a larger scheme to undermine Catholicism.[26] MacHale believed the education issue had arrayed 'in opposing and determined ranks, the patrons of exclusive secular instruction on one side, and the champions of the denominational education of the Catholic Church on the other', and called on priests and people to

[26] Bernard O'Reilly, *John MacHale, Archbishop of Tuam: His Life Times and Correspondence* (2 vols, New York, 1890) ii, 414-5.

oppose ‘a system of alien and unchristian education’, as ‘those who are not zealously in favour of the true faith should be ranked among its enemies.’[27]

Following Cullen’s appointment, a rift developed between him and MacHale, ostensibly over political matters. Cullen used his connection with Rome to influence episcopal appointments and bolster his support, while MacHale found himself increasingly marginalised. MacHale had a forceful personality and an ability to alienate people and Bourke said of him: ‘His Grace regarded diplomacy, even amongst good men, as a kind of chicane, and hence he never advanced in that art.’[28] In 1875 MacHale, now in his eighties, wrote to *Propaganda Fide,* the organisation with responsibility for the Irish Church, to request Thomas MacHale be appointed coadjutor bishop. He had also attempted to have Thomas MacHale appointed bishop of Galway in 1857, but Cullen had installed John MacEvilly. Neither Cullen nor MacEvilly wanted Thomas MacHale as archbishop and the Vatican instructed Archbishop MacHale that he was to hold an election in the usual way and submit three names for selection. The election took place on 13 August 1876, and MacEvilly secured sixteen votes, Thomas MacHale secured twelve and the Reverend Thomas Carr of Maynooth received nine. Ulick Bourke was one of a handful of other priests who received a small number of votes, with two people voting for him.[29] Rome chose MacEvilly and, as a high level of animosity existed between him and MacHale, repercussions inevitably followed. After the failure of his efforts to have Thomas MacHale appointed coadjutor, John MacHale appointed him vicar

[27] *Tuam News*, 10 November 1871.
[28] Bourke, *Life and Times of John MacHale,* p. 187.
[29] *Connaught Telegraph*, 19 August 1876.

general of Tuam, and, as I show in Chapter 4, he did little to create harmony in the diocese during his time there.

John MacHale refused to give his consent to MacEvilly's appointment, causing considerable delays in the process. It has been claimed that in 1875, when MacHale celebrated his golden jubilee as a bishop, John MacEvilly intentionally organised a diocesan retreat for the Galway clergy to coincide with the celebrations.[30] However, MacEvilly denied he organised any such retreat.[31] Even prior to MacEvilly's appointment to Tuam they had disputes over the firebrand nationalist cleric Fr Patrick Lavelle and attempts to conjoin the diocese of Kilmacduagh to Galway.[32] The Vatican went to considerable lengths to install MacEvilly. While 'coadjutor bishops always receive their sanctions from the bishops whom they assist' MacEvilly received his rescripts directly from the pope.[33] In addition he was supplied with written instructions to be handed to the MacHales ordering their cooperation and the Cardinal Prefect wrote directly to both Thomas MacHale and John MacHale instructing them to give MacEvilly all possible support.[34] MacEvilly relocated to Tuam at the end of August 1879, the week following the Knock Apparition, but John MacHale withheld cooperation and it seems the two communicated entirely in writing.[35] These communications highlighted the acrimonious nature of their relationship. MacEvilly accused MacHale of violating canon law and contravening papal orders by continuing to exercise functions that had

[30] Hynes, *Knock,* p. 175; O'Reilly, *MacHale,* ii, p. 626.
[31] Undated draft of letter, c. 1890, from John MacEvilly to the editor of the *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* (Tuam Diocesan Archive, MacEvilly Papers, B2/8/ii/2).
[32] Liam Bane, *The Bishop in Politics: Life and Career of John MacEvilly* (Westport, 1993), p. 40.
[33] Tobias Kirby to John MacEvilly, August 1879 (TDA, MacEvilly papers, B1/1-i/10).
[34] Kirby to MacEvilly, August 1879 (TDA, MacEvilly papers, B1/1-i/10); John MacEvilly to John MacHale 29 August 1879 (TDA, MacEvilly papers, B1/1-iii/4); Kirby to MacEvilly, 26 July 1879 (TDA, MacEvilly Papers, B1/1-i/10).
[35] MacEvilly to MacHale, 28 October 1879 (TDA, MacEvilly Papers, B1/1-iii/4).

been delegated to MacEvilly.[36] Both MacEvilly and MacHale corresponded with Rome and made complaints about each other and, on 19 July 1880, Kirby informed MacEvilly that, 'the authorities are anxious that as far as can be, the *modus operandi*, should be so tempered as to hurt as little as possible the susceptibilities of the aged archbishop.'[37] The once mighty Lion of the West now found his authority undermined by the Vatican as they appointed a successor disagreeable to him and, at best, humoured his whims while they waited for him to pass away.

When the commission of investigation into Knock sat in October 1879 it acted on behalf of a diocese that was, if not in turmoil, at least in a state of confusion. The commission's report did not stir the diocese to any form of action, but whether this was because it was not taken seriously or because of administrative reasons is hard to say. Regardless, Bourke was appointed head of the commission and had considerable autonomy in its operations. Bourke had enjoyed the patronage of MacHale since an early age, but, as president of St Jarlath's and diocesan secretary, would have had to deal with him more than most people. He would therefore have been more aware than most of the negative aspects of MacHale's character. His biography of MacHale is no hagiography; he pointed out negative aspects of his personality such as his lack of diplomatic tact and his tendency to pledge support to political movements but offer no real leadership.

Bourke's transfer to Claremorris in 1878 could be interpreted as a tactical retreat in advance of the commencement of MacEvilly's tenure, but this overlooks important facts. Claremorris was a highly desirable parish that had been vacated by the death of another of MacHale's nephews, Richard MacHale. Furthermore, Bourke

[36] MacEvilly to MacHale, 2 March 1881 (TDA, MacEvilly papers, B1/1-iii/4).
[37] Kirby to MacEvilly, 19 July 1880, (TDA, MacEvilly papers, B1/1-i/10).

spent thirteen years as president of St Jarlath's, whereas the average length of a term as president was five, so there was nothing abrupt about his departure. Having failed to secure more than two votes for the coadjutor position, advancement to a higher position in the Church was unlikely and, moreover, after years of service in the archdiocese Bourke found that Thomas MacHale received much greater support from the archbishop. When Bourke died in 1887 obituaries said he had suffered from a long illness, without specifying its length or nature. It is possible, although not certain, that his health was already declining when he transferred to Claremorris and this was part of the reason for the move. Alternatively, he may have wished to free himself from the administrative responsibilities of the college and diocese in order to pursue his literary endeavours. While Bourke had been close to MacHale it is inaccurate to brand him simply as a MacHale loyalist. Indeed, the next chapter demonstrates that on the question of the Land War his views aligned more closely to MacEvilly's than to MacHale's. His presence in Claremorris in 1879, however, was central in the role he played in both the Land War and the Knock apparition and the administrative confusion of the diocese granted him considerable autonomy.

## Bourke and Politics

In 1866 Bourke was one of a number of priests from the deanery of Tuam who released in the press a series of resolutions outlining their views on topics such as the land and national questions. While highlighting the errors of British rule, it is hardly a radical document, but it does give insights into the political views of Bourke and his colleagues. For example, it stated that 'all classes suffer under British rule' and that oppression threatens the divine faith. The statement highlights the devotion

of its signatories to their faith and it opposes class-based politics. It went on to express regret for the continuing misrule of Ireland, claiming that the country suffered because of two 'powerful conflicting forces', British rule, and militant nationalists who used ‘ill-advised and unconstitutional efforts.' This condemnation was in keeping with clerical pronouncements dating back to the Young Ireland movement and, while some clergymen supported the Young Irelanders and the Fenians, they were in the minority. The statement from the clergy highlights the importance of issues such as tenant right, free education, and religious freedom, and states that self-legislation was needed for Ireland, but in the meantime constitutional efforts should be used to secure ‘as much justice and peaceful security as possible’.[38] The statement emphasises the importance of securing tenant right, but declares that many landlords were good people. The signatories astutely observed that a consequence of misrule was emigration and this could lead to emigrants spreading radicalism.

The document’s analysis of the decline of independent opposition particularly suited the prejudices of its authors, as they claimed that treachery had broken up the Irish party in the 1850s. While maintaining that 'Lucas, Moore, Duffy and several others were distinguished members', the Tuam clergy felt that self-interest had led many Irish MPs to support a government that opposed the pope and caused the loss of his territories. This interpretation conveniently ignored the failure of Cullen and other bishops to support the Irish party. Cullen opposed the clergy playing an overt role in political matters and, while both MacHale and Cullen addressed the Catholic Defence Association on its formation in 1851, Cullen argued

[38] *Freeman’s Journal*, 10 March 1866. *Connaught Telegraph*, 14 March 1866.

against its use as a basis for the establishment of a new political party.[39] This organisation, which campaigned for religious rights, and its contemporary organisation the Tenant League, had provided many with hope that Irish MPs could form a party representing Irish issues. The Irish Party briefly manifested itself in a policy of independent opposition, the system whereby Irish MPs would not ally with the Whigs or Tories but cooperate in the interests of Ireland. The policy attracted considerable support in the 1852 election, but its success was short lived. Bourke believed that independent opposition had been the best option open to the Irish people. However, writing in 1882, while critical of the betrayal of MPs who accepted government positions, he conceded that many clergy had been complicit in the failure of the Irish Party and 'these men, who had acted the part of Judas, were condoned by their own prelates and by many of the priests.'[40] Foremost among those who failed to condemn the MPs who joined the government was Cullen, who secured a formal ban on the participation of the Irish clergy in politics.[41] In 1854 *Propaganda* endorsed restrictions — brought forward by Cullen, but opposed by MacHale — on priests participating in politics. These restrictions, however, were not all-encompassing. They forbade priests from electioneering or discussing 'merely secular' matters in a church or at mass, while allowing them freedom to 'maintain the rights of the church and to be "solicitous" in having Parliament and poor-law boards stocked with "men of integrity and favourable to the Catholic religion".'[42]

The 1866 document from the Tuam clergy states that a consequence of the decline of the Irish Party was that a loss of confidence in public men had caused the

[39] Larkin, *Making of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland 1850-60*, p. 99.
[40] Bourke, *Life and Times of MacHale,* p. 167.
[41] Colin Barr, 'Paul Cullen, Italy and the Irish Catholic Imagination, 1826-70', in Colin Barr, Michelle Finelli and Anne O'Connor (eds), *Nation/Nazione* (Dublin, 2014), p.140.
[42] Theodore Hoppen, *Elections, Politics and Society in Ireland, 1832-1885* (Oxford, 1984), p. 236.

people 'to listen too credulously to the delusive representations of dangerous instructors'.[43] Bourke repeated this narrative in his biography of John MacHale. Bourke believed a lack of constitutional options led to more militant action. He gave as an example the formation of the Phoenix Society in 1858 in south Kerry and west Cork and claimed: 'Secret organisation at that period, is at this day, seen to have been the natural result of the sudden stoppage put to the flow of *legitimate* [emphasis mine] patriotism.'[44] Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa had founded the Phoenix Society and it merged into the Irish Republican Brotherhood, or Fenians. This was a physical force organisation that James Stephens had established in 1858 and for the following decades it was synonymous with Irish insurrectionary nationalism. Stephens had spent time in continental Europe and was influenced by continental revolutionary organisations.

Paul Cullen vehemently opposed the Fenians. His time in Rome had coloured his political outlook because he witnessed first-hand the seizing of the Papal States, the short-lived Italian Republic of 1848-9, and the workings of secret societies, which he felt were full of Freemasons and Protestants. He saw the hand of England in attempts to undermine the Pope and believed that, even if Catholics were well-intentioned in subscribing to radicalism, organisations founded on Godless ideas would ultimately betray them. He drew parallels between events in Italy and Ireland, even when there was no basis for them.[45] Niall Whelehan's book, *Dynamiters: Irish Nationalism and Political Violence in the Wider World 1867-1900,* provides an account of the ideological influences of Fenianism and moves beyond the simple binary often used to represent the relationship between British rule and Irish

[43] *Freeman's Journal,* 10 March 1866; *Connaught Telegraph*, 14 March 1866.
[44] Bourke, *Life and Times of MacHale,* p. 182.
[45] Barr, 'Paul Cullen, Italy and the Irish Catholic Imagination', pp 135-7.

rebellion.[46] Whelehan ably demonstrates the influence such disparate movements as French republicanism, Russian nihilism, Italian anarchism and the skirmishers of the American Civil War had on the ideological development of Fenianism, particularly in relation to the use of violence. While the aim of Fenianism was national independence, the spirit of the age shaped it. The large Irish diaspora provided funds, personnel, and, very often, views and experiences that increased the militancy of the organisation. Although not a socialist organisation, the Fenians were mainly drawn from the working class. Nearly half were artisans or skilled workers with the remaining membership a mixture of labourers, shop assistants, clerks, and teachers.[47] Their newspaper, the *Irish News*, carried articles that 'mixed affinities for French republicanism, anti-clericalism and belief that the work of the IRB was located in a trajectory of insurrectionary action that travelled through the rebellions of 1798 and 1848.'[48] Although, Whelehan maintains, it was silent on the Italian question. Regardless, this working-class organisation, coloured by the politics of continental Europe and advocating armed insurrection, was a particular bugbear of Cullen's.

Bourke's public career spanned the early 1850s to the late 1880s. In a political sense this era encompassed the failure of independent opposition, the rise of Fenianism, and the growth of the Home Rule movement. Bourke's public pronouncements on politics always situated him on the more moderate side of the nationalist spectrum. He admired Edmund Burke and his own views on the French Revolution were unambiguous:

[46] Niall Whelehan, *The Dynamiters: Irish Nationalism and Political Violence in the Wider World, 1867-1900* (Cambridge, 2012).
[47] John Newsinger, *Fenianism in Mid-Victorian Britain* (London, 1994), p. 29.
[48] Whelehan, *Dynamiters*, p. 34

> All the intelligent, noble-minded, truthful; all lovers of order, social propriety, of honour and virtue (were) put into prison, or led to the guillotine for slaughter. France (was) deluged with the blood of the virtuous and the noble; Europe become a battle-ground in which the fierce uncontrolled passions of the multitude sought to satiate their longing to destroy whatever science, reason, or religion had approved and prized.

He was, however, an admirer of Napoleon who, he believed, had returned order and Catholicism to France. In his biography of MacHale he recounted the archbishop's recollections of the French landing at Killala, and the warning MacHale received from his parish priest, who said, 'bad as the English are, they believe in God, but the French people, whom I know well, have no faith in God; they have no religion; in name they are Catholic; infidel in act and life.'[49] Despite these statements, the English hanged this priest, Father Conry, for collaborating with the French. Regardless of his hostility to the French Revolution, Bourke claimed that on this occasion the French came as friends, not to injure Irish people or damage property. English perfidy, on the other hand, was evidenced by the hanging of Conry. Bourke found it easier to be nostalgic about the revolutionary movements of the past than to support those of the present.

When Italian nationalists sought to unite Italy their designs on the Papal States led many in Ireland to put allegiance to the pope before any sort of transnational solidarity. In 1859 and 1860 the Church in Ireland organised support for Pope Pius IX and, according to Ciarán O'Carroll, there were three definable stages to this support. The first involved monster meetings, petitions, and publicity.

[49] Bourke, *Life and Times of MacHale,* pp 26-7 and 30.

Fundraising followed this and the third stage was the organisation of a papal brigade that went to Italy to fight on behalf of the pope against the Italian nationalists. At a meeting in Castlebar, MacHale condemned 'Sardinian aggression' and English complicity and 'went so far as to describe reports of tyranny in the Papal States as a fable circulated by the English.'[50] 1300 Irish men were organised into the Battalion of St Patrick, also known as the Papal Brigade. Bourke claimed that public meetings in the archdiocese of Tuam for the defence of the Papal States in the 1850s and 60s were 'splendid' and boasted that the diocese raised over £3,000 and 'more than an average contingent of Catholic volunteers to fill up the ranks of the Pope's new army'.[51] Bourke himself, in early 1861, wrote to the *Nation* to notify them that he had given his £1 subscription to Mr Fahy of Tuam for the support of the Irish Papal Brigades.[52]

For the greater period of Bourke's career radical Irish nationalism found its expression in Fenianism. As outlined below, many Fenians or their sons attended St Jarlath's College, which has given the false impression to some that Bourke supported Fenianism. Fr Patrick Lavelle, a known Fenian sympathiser, had also been Bourke's classmate at Maynooth. When the Fenians, in 1859, exhumed the body of the Young Irelander Terrence Bellew MacManus and sought to return it to Ireland from the United States, they came into conflict with Paul Cullen, who wished to avoid appearing to endorse them. Gerard Moran maintains that even constitutional nationalists had no issue with MacManus or Young Ireland but they did not wish to give the Fenians the opportunity to use the occasion for their own ends. Cullen

[50] Ciarán O'Carroll, 'The Irish Papal Brigade', in Barr, Finelli and O'Connor (eds), *Nation/Nazione*, p. 73.
[51] Bourke, *Life and Times of MacHale,* p. 183.
[52] *Nation,* 26 January 1861.

prohibited the use of the Pro-Cathedral in Dublin for the funeral and forbade clergy from participating. Regardless, Lavelle, writing to the head of the funeral committee, E.J. Ryan, deplored this situation and enclosed a subscription of £1, apparently from himself, Ulick Bourke, and Fr Peter Geraghty. Moran states that Bourke's association with Lavelle, including dining with him prior to the writing of his letter on MacManus, led some to suspect him of Fenian sympathies.[53] This event, however, is an anachronism and Bourke's more overt statements against Fenianism outweigh any conclusions derived from it.

For Bourke the nation was its culture. While he may not have supported the most advanced elements of nationalism it seems that, for him, the most horrific aspect of British rule was the destruction of Irish language, culture, and faith. Speaking in 1878 at the opening of a library in Castlebar, he referred to the Irish love of learning that had flourished despite the penal laws. He believed that all groups that invaded Ireland had attempted to suppress Irish culture and 'the early Saxon settlers were quite as hostile to the spread of literature in Ireland as had been the proud invader (the Dane).'[54] Bourke felt the abolition of the Penal Laws marked a departure in British rule and the beginning of a more enlightened and compassionate era, and evidence that the English were not necessarily unsympathetic to the plight of the Irish. In his writings on the Irish language he frequently emphasised the difference in the approach of the British at the beginning of the nineteenth century and towards the century's end. He believed in the Irish language and culture and the need for a restored parliament. He did not, however, believe in revolution or

[53] Gerard Moran, *A Radical Priest in Mayo: Fr Patrick Lavelle: The Rise and Fall of an Irish Nationalist* (Dublin, 1994), pp 1, 47 and 60.
[54] *Connaught Telegraph*, 16 March 1878.

republicanism, which would upend the social order or threaten the Catholic Church. He may have had some small admiration for the more romantic aspects of Fenianism, but his politics were firmly in the Home Rule camp.

Bourke belonged to the Home Rule League and was elected onto its committee in January 1879. This happened only by the very narrowest of margins. The League's rules specified that it required fifty extra people on the council, but when the meeting had gone on for some hours, without breaking for dinner, only forty-five had been elected. Bourke was one of the last five hastily added to the committee so the delegates could leave.[55] As with many committees on which he served, he may not have done much actual work. On 1 February 1877, while in Dublin on a trip that also placed him at the meeting of the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language Bourke attended a banquet given in honour of the Home Rule leader Isaac Butt. He had a place at the top table, possibly as John MacHale was unable to attend, alongside Mitchell Henry, MP, Rev Professor Galbraith, McCarthy Dowling, MP, and G.H. Kirk, MP. The chairman, Maurice Brooks, MP, proposed a toast to the queen, lords and commons and hoped for a parliament in College Green. There was a further toast to Home Rule and McCarthy Dowling proposed a toast to the 'patriotic clergy of Ireland', saying that Home Rule would not enjoy the support it had if not for them. Bourke stated that all the clergy were patriotic and that 'it appeared to him that Home Rule was the only panacea for Ireland, for he believed if there was not this Home Rule agitation those in authority would have a great deal to do.'[56] This statement makes it clear that Bourke believed Home Rule played an important role in stemming the tide of more radical

[55] *Freeman's Journal,* 30 January 1879.
[56] *Freeman's Journal,* 2 February 1877; *Nation* 3 February 1877.

nationalism, just as he believed the failure of the Irish Party had opened the door to Fenianism.

## The *Tuam News*

The *Tuam News* represents a very useful window into the priorities of Ulick Bourke, St Jarlath's College, and the archdiocese of Tuam. Founded in 1870 by Bourke and his nephew John MacPhilpin, its editor and named proprietor, it served as the unofficial publication of both St Jarlath's and the archdiocese of Tuam. It dealt with ecclesiastical matters, the Catholic education question, and issues relating to constitutional nationalism and tenant right. Unfortunately, there are gaps in the extant copies, with the National Library of Ireland and the British Library holding incomplete series for the period 17 March 1871 to July 1873 and nothing between July 1873 and 1882. The copies that exist, however, give a very good overview of the ideology and agenda of the newspaper. The growth of literacy and the proliferation of nationalist newspapers was an important element in the creation of national identity and solidarity in the nineteenth century. Marie Louise Legg's *Newspapers and Nationalism: The Irish Provincial Press 1850-1892* examines the influence and growth of the sector after the Famine. She highlights the ideological slant of many provincial newspapers in Ireland and their relationship to the politics of the age. As well as dealing with the *Tuam News*, and Bourke's relationship to it, she points to the importance of St Jarlath's in inculcating nationalist ideology, claiming that it educated many nationalist newsmen. Furthermore, while conceding

that Bourke was not a Fenian, she gives him considerable credit for influencing Fenians through his role at St Jarlath's.[57]

The *Tuam News and Western Advertiser,* to give its full title, claimed to be the cheapest newspaper in the province and promised its readers a variety of local and national news. It boasted that it provided the most accurate information concerning the Catholic Church at both a diocesan and provincial level. It claimed that it was established due to the inadequacy of other newspapers in covering local issues, and stated: 'We deem the present juncture of affairs, when the elements of public discord are removed – when the people are enlightened by the blessings of education and when publicity is more than ever the recognised safeguard of social security as most opportune for instigating our action.' The paper called for 'unity between Irishmen of all creeds and classes, which can only be effected with the diffusion of knowledge' and said it was 'Catholic in the essential signification of the word' and 'hostile to nothing that is honest.' It claimed that the people would shape its programme and its sympathies lay broadly with the Home Rule movement and the Catholic Church. [58] The stated mission of the *Tuam News* was to 'educate the people, to obtain self-government for Ireland, to advocate the interests of Connaught, to aid in the extension of human liberty. In fine, to be CATHOLIC in the true sense of the word.'[59] This Catholic ideology extended to the personal as well as the political and on 18 April 1873 the paper reproduced an article from *Catholic Opinion* defending the prohibition of mixed marriages.[60] As detailed in the previous chapter, from 1873 the *Tuam News* produced an Irish language section in addition to regular

[57] Marie-Louise Legg, *Newspapers and Nationalism: the Irish provincial press, 1850-1892* (Dublin, 1999) p. 16.
[58] *Tuam News*, 2 June 1871.
[59] Ibid., 8 December 1871.
[60] Ibid., 18 April 1873.

articles, written in English, on the merits of the Irish language. An article by RJG (possibly John Glynn) advocating the teaching of Irish provoked considerable debate in July 1871 with many supporting his stance but others feeling that the teaching of Irish was a waste of time.[61] Legg believes that an unexpected, and somewhat ironic, consequence of the proliferation of the nationalist press in Ireland in the nineteenth century was that it proved detrimental to the Irish language. She cites Benedict Anderson's theory that print curtailed diverse spoken languages. The use of the English language by the nationalist press fixed it as the *lingua franca* of the country.[62]

The paper also made its feelings on the university question known and reproduced an opinion piece from the *Tablet* stating that Trinity College Dublin should be allowed to retain its endowments and religious character as long as Catholics had the same opportunity.[63] The proselytising Irish Church Mission Society also came in for regular attack, with the paper taking pleasure in the confirmation of 200 children on Achill by the archbishop, and the *Tuam News* alleged the Society had spent the massive sum of £2,500,000 in 'cultivating this spot to no avail.'[64] The St Patrick's Day 1871 issue, which carried a prominent advertisement for St Jarlath's, further highlighted the priorities of the paper by publishing an article that accused the gentry and police of 'inventing' stories about Ribbonism. The same issue published another article critical of endowments to Protestant schools, and several articles on St Patrick. Articles on St Jarlath's and diocesan affairs regularly featured in the paper and any event held there received

[61] Ibid., 21 July and 11 August 1871.
[62] Legg, *Newspapers and Nationalism*, p. 100.
[63] *Tuam News*, 21 July 1871.
[64] Ibid., 2 June 1871.

considerable attention. John MacHale's movements were also reported in detail, in particular during the summer months as he travelled through the diocese administering the sacrament of confirmation. Praise for Catholic education was not restricted to St Jarlath's and it said of the Christian Brothers' Schools that they did not merely provide a secular education and 'morality without religion', but instead the education imparted had 'as its basis the firm truths of God's commandments and the theory and example of holiness of life, and this education is imparted especially to the children of the poor'.[65]

Despite its nationalist tone, the *Tuam News* demonstrated its conservatism in its attitude towards the Paris Commune of 1871. The paper lamented the murder of the Archbishop of Paris: 'the bullets of the Communists pierced his venerable person, and the courtyard of his prison witnessed his dignified resignation, his heroic firmness, and the awe and remorse of the very men who were his executioners. This murder is the crowning crime of these wretches.'[66] This conservatism also applied to local affairs and, while the *Tuam News* sympathised with tenants and advocated tenant right, it defended 'good' landlords and supported them in elections. It was nationalist, but supportive of Home Rule and, while it did not actively condemn Fenianism, it condemned communism, Italian republicanism, and anti-clericalism, a stance in line with the Church's position. It criticised British misrule, but reported sympathetically on the illness of Queen Victoria. It was moderate, but on the militant side of moderate.

[65] Ibid., 29 September 1871.
[66] Ibid., 2 June 1871.

## Bourke and Education

Education was central to Catholic Church policy throughout the nineteenth century. Both Cullen and MacHale felt that the government wanted to use education to destroy the Church.[67] Speaking of the early relationship between the two, Bourke said that when consulted by *Propaganda* MacHale had endorsed Cullen's appointment as archbishop and 'in Dr Cullen, the Archbishop of Tuam gained a champion to the cause of pure Catholic education, opposed alike to the national system and to the infidel colleges.'[68] Opposition to education policies may have temporarily united MacHale and Cullen, but their alliance did not last. The national school system was initiated in 1831 and remained controversial for decades. Bourke claimed that MacHale opposed the system of national education because 'he saw that the Anglican representatives of the Board began from the very start to make the national system a vast scheme for proselytising the Catholic boys and girls of Ireland.'[69] They supposedly excluded the Catholic catechism, but included scripture prepared by Calvinists. MacHale wanted a system of schools that were separate and denominational and to this end he and the bishops with whom he was allied appealed to the Vatican for support in 1839.[70] Eighteen bishops, the vast majority, spoke out in favour of national education and in opposition to MacHale. Regardless, the Vatican expressed opposition to the system and a situation emerged whereby individual bishops could decide whether or not to cooperate with the national schools in their own dioceses. Cullen's influence may have been central to forming Church policy on the national schools and, while the differences of opinion between

[67] Larkin, *Making of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland, 1850-60*, p. 99.
[68] Bourke, *Life and Times of John MacHale,* p. 156.
[69] Ibid., p. 105.
[70] O'Reilly, *John MacHale,* i, p. 421.

Cullen and MacHale are widely recorded, the common ground they found on education became the bedrock of Catholic policy in Ireland.

Through the establishment of the Queen's Colleges, beginning in 1844, the Westminster government attempted to introduce to Ireland a system of secular third level education and to provide an alternative to the Anglican Trinity College. Believing the Queen's Colleges were based on the same principle as the national school system, MacHale 'with voice and pen proclaimed them to be fraught with moral mischief for the Catholic youth of Ireland.'[71] Despite some bishops accepting positions in the administration of the colleges the majority of bishops refused to accept them. The Catholic University was proposed by the Vatican as an alternative to the 'Godless' Queen's Colleges, but found opponents in those bishops who had supported the Colleges. Even attempts to establish a Catholic university led to a worsening of relations as MacHale, by mid-1852, came to oppose the appointment of John Henry Newman as its head.[72] Catholics who wished to pursue further education were left with limited options and St Jarlath's College, and similar institutions, combined the roles of minor seminary, secondary school and college.

As outlined in the previous chapter, Bourke had strong opinions on Irish language education and what constituted an appropriate national education. His position as president of St Jarlath's College gave him an outlet for his views. According to Bourke, following the bloody suppression of the 1798 rebellion William Pitt aimed to do what Queen Elizabeth, James I and the Penal Laws had failed to do, 'to make the people of Ireland cease to be Catholic.' For Bourke, the

[71] Bourke, *Life and Times of John MacHale,* p. 151.
[72] Larkin, *Making of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland, 1850 – 60,* p. 202; Colin Barr, *Paul Cullen, John Henry Newman and the Catholic University of Ireland, 1845 – 1865* (Notre Dame, 2003) p. 72.

extension of secular education served no purpose other than to continue the British tradition of attempting to wipe out the Catholic faith. He claimed that this was done 'under the feigned desire of giving freedom of conscience, and liberty to worship God as they pleased, to the Catholics of the two kingdoms.'[73] Bourke's views on education and the Irish language found expression in his roles first as a professor at St Jarlath's, from 1858, and later as president, from 1865 to 1878.

On becoming president of St Jarlath's, Bourke undertook an ambitious expansion project that increased the size of the school considerably. He advertised in newspapers for monetary contributions and, according to John Cunningham, he spent £100 on this publicity drive which 'was as much an attempt to add to the fame and prestige of the college as it was a fund raising exercise.' Donors included Undersecretary Thomas Burke (later assassinated by the Invincibles), Mitchell Henry MP, and Captain John Philip Nolan, who, as outlined in Chapter 4, was later elected to parliament in controversial circumstances. Cunningham states that Bourke left the College in a state of financial confusion and, having spent £3,614 on improvements, incurred debts of £600 to a priest of the diocese, £700 to the nuns of the convent of Mercy in Ballinrobe, and £300 to a bank. Only £816 was raised through the newspaper campaign and a further £875 was raised through a belated church gate collection.[74] Advertisements for St Jarlath's were a regular feature in the *Tuam News* and in 1871 it played its role in the expansion drive. Readers were told that increasing student numbers necessitated the expansion and they were reminded that 'the connections of the college with the cause and principles of Catholic education' were 'of more than local interest.' The reader was informed that diocesan colleges

[73] Bourke, *Life and Times of MacHale*, p. 60.
[74] John Cunningham, *St Jarlath's College Tuam: 1800-2000* (Tuam, 1999) pp 58, 61, 62, 70, and 90.

were nurseries of learning and virtue and that due to the altered relations of the state towards education, as exemplified by Maynooth, they deserved to be fostered:

> The fact is, colleges of this class have been hitherto, in the hands of the vast majority of the Catholics of Ireland, the only substitute for a University; or for provincial Catholic colleges in connection with a University, which a Catholic people as we are long ought to have had, and which we should have, if we were ruled by a government really and fully enlightened.[75]

The *Tuam News* highlighted the Catholic and national credentials of St Jarlath's, which were expressed in both 'tone and language' and Bourke promised 100 masses for those who contributed to the building fund.

During Bourke's time, several students at St Jarlath's had Fenian connections, particularly in the late 1860s and early 1870s. Two of the exiled O'Donovan Rossa's nineteen children not only attended St Jarlath's but had their participation in school plays used as publicity for the plays and the college itself. Their fees were paid by newspaper editor Richard Piggott and in return their father wrote articles for him. In school performances they shared the boards with John O'Connor Power, a man who, the *Tuam News* remarked, 'even now may rank as a finished elocutionist, and whose distinct and powerful utterance, joined to the grace and fitness of his gesture, marks him as one who can essay and achieve the highest flights of oratory'.[76] At the time of his attendance at St Jarlath's, O'Connor Power was an active Fenian and a member of the organisation's supreme council. Among students with militant connections was a son of Michael Larkin, one of the Manchester Martyrs, whose fees were paid by the Marchioness of Queensbury.

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[75] *Tuam News*, 17 March 1871.
[76] Cunningham, *St Jarlath's,* p. 74.

Another member of the Fenian Supreme Council who attended St Jarlath's was Mark Ryan. Like O'Connor Power, Ryan had returned to Tuam from Lancashire and, following the failure of the 1867 rising, decided to remain to continue his education. He was a favourite of Bourke's due to his interest in the Irish language and in his memoir he described Bourke as a 'Fenian at Heart' who told him, 'You know I am not against the Fenians'.[77] He supposedly uttered this statement in the summer of 1871, when Bourke asked Ryan to mute his activities at the college following the pope's condemnation of Fenianism, at Cullen's instigation. This statement is incorrect but it is possible Bourke, who had a habit of tailoring his statements to suit his audience, said it. The police closely monitored Fenian activities at the school and opened the post of known Fenians, including correspondence under assumed names between Ryan and O'Connor Power relating to arms procurement.[78] Ryan was also involved in campaigning in elections and, at Bourke's instigation, was one of about a dozen students involved in writing appeals on behalf of George Henry Moore in 1868. He also participated in the election campaign of Captain John Philip Nolan in 1872, as did other Fenians, and he claimed Nolan was sympathetic to the Fenian movement.[79] Not all the children of famous parents who attended St Jarlath's were Fenians, and two of John O'Donovan's sons were students there, which, no doubt, was a point of considerable pride for Bourke.[80]

As president, Bourke had the freedom to indulge many of his passions and he brought cultural nationalism to the fore of the institution. With the inauguration of prizes for results in Irish examinations by the Gaelic Union in 1880, the role that the

[77] Mark Ryan, *Fenian Memories* (Dublin, 1945) pp 28-9.
[78] Police report on Fenian activities at St Jarlath's (National Archive of Ireland, Fenian Papers, A567).
[79] Ryan, *Fenian Memories*, pp 30 and 41-2.
[80] Ibid., p. 26.

Irish language played in St Jarlath's was visible to all.[81] Mark Ryan stated that to the best of his knowledge, when he attended, St Jarlath's was the only college in Ireland that taught the Irish language and history.[82] During Bourke's presidency, the role of drama in the institution was taken to new levels, both in its nationalism and in its use as a publicity tool for the school.

The *Tuam News* of 16 June 1871 reported on the first annual exhibition held at St Jarlath's, which had showcased the new buildings. As well as bestowing praise on the president and archbishop, the article detailed the patriotic activities of students. These included a prize for an essay on the 'Conversion of Ireland' and recitation of a speech by Henry Grattan on the importance of a home parliament. In addition, there were performances of nationalist ballads, including the *Rising of the Moon* sung by John O'Connor Power. O'Connor Power also won praise for his delivery of a scene between the Cardinal and Cromwell in Shakespeare's *Henry VIII.* The grand finale of the performance was a rendition of *God Save Ireland,* a song recently composed by T.D. Sullivan. The issue of the *Tuam News* that reported on the exhibition contrasted the nationalist pedigree of the education students at St Jarlath's received with the national school system. It reproduced a letter from MacHale to Gladstone in which he stated:

> No further toleration can be allowed to those delusive and insulting experiments by which it has been sought to win the confidence of the Irish people, and to persuade them to acquiesce in alien and anti-national projects of instruction, instead of nobly striving for the goal which the early historical

[81] *Gaelic Union Rules*, pp 13-5.
[82] Ryan, *Fenian Memories*, p. 26.

> renown of the Catholic schools of Ireland points out to the present as it did to past generations.[83]

A further exhibition was hosted in December 1871 and the *Tuam News* was, as always, fulsome in its praise, claiming the exhibition was 'perfect in all its details reflecting the greatest credit on the masters and pupils of an institution which is hallowed by its age, its character, and its patron.' A performance of *Lord Edward Fitzgerald* featured Jerry and John O'Donovan Rossa and the *Tuam News* said this play reflected a high literary character and patriotic feeling, which were symbolic and demonstrative of the 'healthy education' imparted at St Jarlath's. Following a fifteen minute interval, during which the audience was treated to a performance of Moore's melodies, the sombre nationalist tone of the performance was countered by a 'popular comic farce', *Box and Cox,* which starred John O'Connor Power as Box, a London printer. A selection of songs ended the exhibition and O'Connor Power provided a rendition of *The Green Flag,* in a departure from his preceding comic role.[84]

Provincial and national newspapers regularly carried advertisements for St Jarlath's, which were closely linked to Bourke's expansion of the institution. So too did newspapers aimed at the diaspora. These advertisements stressed the pleasant healthful environs of St Jarlath's and stated:

> The education imparted is such as to prepare young men who aspire to the sacerdotal state for entrance into Maynooth College or the Irish College Paris. Many have preferred to finish their collegiate course in the Missionary College of All Hallows; others have gone to Rome or Valladolid; not a few

[83] *Tuam News,* 16 June 1871.
[84] Ibid., 15 December 1871.

> are at present in the universities and colleges spread through the United States and the Canadas. Lay students are prepared for the learned professions or for public offices.[85]

While a principal objective of the College may have been to prepare students for the priesthood, clearly those who did not have a vocation were turned out as respectable middle class Catholics, ready to take prominent positions in society. This objective fitted into Bourke's vision of class structure and his desire to nurture a Catholic middle class.

In keeping with this vision classics featured prominently in the curriculum at St Jarlath's, along with modern languages such as French and Italian and written and spoken Irish. The high standard of Irish teaching was evidenced in the prizes awarded by the Gaelic Union in 1880 and 1881, when students of St Jarlath's featured among the winners.[86] Advertisements for St Jarlath's reassured parents that students would be kept under watchful care and their physical needs attended to. The advertisement further stated that 'in response to requests from fathers and friends in America and the Colonies the President is happy to announce that he can now receive from these countries any number who may wish to study at St Jarlath's.'[87] For most Irish people, even those of the diaspora, the fees of St Jarlath's would have put attendance beyond their reach, at £24 per annum for non-ecclesiastical students, £20 per annum for ecclesiastical students from outside the diocese and £16 for ecclesiastical students of the diocese. Not content with simply having paid advertising in newspapers, Bourke regularly wrote to the *Nation* with lists of

[85] *Nation*, 14 June 1867.
[86] *Gaelic Union Rules*, pp 13-16.
[87] *Nation* 14 June 1867.

examination results or reports of prizes awarded so prospective fee payers could see for themselves the quality of education their money could buy.[88]

Bourke's role as president of St Jarlath's foregrounds his involvement in Catholic and nationalist education. The Catholic character of the institution was supplemented, not only by the teaching of the Irish language and Irish history, but by the performative element of the nationalist material in the school exhibitions. The involvement of students with nationalist associations only served to heighten the nationalist credentials of St Jarlath's. The use of the press to disseminate knowledge of the character of the college heightened public awareness of it as a nationalist institution and helped to strengthen the connections of the 'imagined community' of Irish Catholic nationalists at home and abroad.

## Conclusion

As highlighted above, the Catholic Church in Ireland consolidated its position throughout the nineteenth century and particularly after the Famine. Devotion was more regularised, power was more centralised, and the clergy were more deferential. Moreover, it had nurtured a situation where Catholicism became an essential element of Irish identity. Irish people had aired grievances throughout the nineteenth century and the Church had often shown sympathy, but it was concerned primarily with its own situation and sought to prevent any undermining of its authority. In particular, it focused its energies on the field of education and saw the growth of secularism as a threat. However, it did not merely view secularism as a threat emanating from the British government. Political movements in Ireland, which

[88] *Nation* 14 June 1867, *Nation* 27 July 1867.

sought to address popular grievances, had the potential to become imbued with the secular spirit of continental revolutionary movements. An effective way of combating this double-pronged secular assault was to focus on the external threat of secularism while promoting moderate political responses, which were sympathetic to the Church, at home.

Ulick Bourke was an instrument of this conservatism and, despite being a cultural nationalist, he espoused moderate politics, preferring constitutional agitation to militant action, and demanding Home Rule rather than a republic. He was also an instrument of Catholic educational policy, albeit Catholic education with a particularly national character, as his role in St Jarlath's illustrates. Ulick Bourke saw the Catholic faith and the Irish language as expressions of Irish culture. He used the written word to convey this and to shape Irish identity. He opposed secularism and radicalism, including the French Revolution and the Italian Risorgimento, and showed explicit support for Home Rule and opposition to more militant nationalism. The musical and theatrical performances at St Jarlath's may have had Fenian participants, but they also linked a Catholic educational institution, under the direct patronage of the Archbishop of Tuam, with national identity. These performances, far from encouraging secular militant nationalism, helped to increase the control the Church could exercise over nationalists. The £10 donation of Undersecretary Burke (a Catholic and native of Tuam) to St Jarlath's demonstrates that, while nationalist, there was nothing anti-establishment about the College.

In post-Famine Ireland the regularisation of devotion happened in tandem with a recovering economy where farms increased in size, as there was less competition for land. Many farmers moved from subsistence to having money to spend in shops, which in turn led to the growth of the merchant classes in towns. As

people's material conditions improved, a desire to educate their children developed and the Church took advantage of this and further developed the idea of Catholicism as synonymous with Irishness. In 1879, however, the threat of a new famine shook people from the level of material comfort to which they had become accustomed. A massive social movement arose, to a large degree spontaneously, but facilitated too by many Fenians as well as home rulers. The secular leadership of the Land War was to pose a direct challenge to the authority of the clergy.

Bourke at first said little on the movement. However, when clerical condemnations provoked a backlash he attempted to propose more moderate solutions. These were poorly received at first, although he eventually became the first priest to chair a land meeting. Bourke proved surprisingly pragmatic in bringing about a compromise that helped the Church regain the lead over the people and temper many of the more militant elements of the campaign. However, he appeared to be a voice of moderation as an emboldened people made ever-greater demands. The Knock apparition in August 1879 may have had the appearance of spontaneous folk devotion, but the hand of Ulick Bourke again played a role in shaping events and taking control of the narrative in such a way that it would be acceptable to ultramontane forces. The Church in Ireland had made significant advances since the Famine, but they were advances that had to be defended. The Knock apparition, however, would provide a direct link between the deanery of Claremorris and God, or, at the very least, his mother.

# Chapter 4: 'A Few Good Canons' – Clergy, Landlords, and Agitation

From 1870-76 agricultural incomes rose, eviction rates fell, and there was relatively little agrarian crime. 1877, however, marked the first of three years of bad harvests caused by excessive rainfall.[1] Fears of a new famine in 1879 proved the catalyst for a movement that made an indelible mark on the social and economic structures of Ireland. The Land League, founded in 1879, was a broad-based movement that included nationalists of many hues. It agitated for rent reduction, tenant right and, ultimately, peasant proprietorship. The Catholic Church was slow to show support and, as outlined below, when they did, they did so cautiously. Connaught, and Mayo in particular, had suffered disproportionately during the Great Famine and memory of it attached a particular urgency to the land issue. During the Land War Ulick Bourke was based in Claremorris, Co. Mayo, close to where the counties of Mayo, Galway, and Roscommon meet. This area was the heartland of the agitation and hosted a large number of protest meetings, including one at Irishtown on 20 April 1879 which is regarded as the beginning of the Land War.

Knock is in this area but the apparition did not happen against the backdrop of an established Land League. Instead, it happened against the backdrop of an ascendant social movement, one which is easier to define in hindsight. The agitation began in April but the Mayo Land League was not formed until August 1879, the same month as the Knock apparition. The National Land League formed in October, the month the Commission of Investigation into Knock interviewed the witnesses. When a monster meeting took place at Irishtown on 20 April 1879, press reports did

[1] T.W. Moody, *Davitt and Irish Revolution, 1846-82* (New York, 1981), p. 128.

not identify it as the formation or beginning of anything. Other tenant right meetings had taken place, including one earlier that same week, on Easter Monday, 14 April, in Kilnalleck, Co. Cavan, addressed by, among others, Charles Stewart Parnell, MP. However, the scale of the Irishtown meeting was an indicator of its significance: 15,000 people attended. On 26 April, the, admittedly partisan, *Connaught Telegraph* declared that 'one of the greatest public demonstrations ever witnessed in the West of Ireland took place on Sunday last at Irishtown near Claremorris', adding that 'since the days of O'Connell a larger public demonstration has not been witnessed'.[2]

There were notable differences between the Irishtown and Kilnalleck demonstrations. For one, the advertisement for the Kilnalleck demonstration stated that it was a 'Great Tenant Right and Home Rule Demonstration' whereas the placards advertising Irishtown, while making mention of the presence of MPs, stated it was simply a 'Great Tenant Right Meeting'.[3] Another difference was that the advertisement for the Kilnalleck demonstration carried the endorsement of John Boylan, parish priest of Crosserlough, while priests, including Canon Ulick Bourke of the nearby parish of Claremorris, were conspicuous by their absence at Irishtown. During the Land War both constitutional and advanced Nationalists took to platforms to demand land reform and, while the force of numbers gave the greatest authority to the movement, it gained significant strength from the New Departure, the alliance between Home Rulers and Fenians that centred on the land issue. The New Departure was never the official policy of either organisation. However, for many of their members and supporters, the land question was every bit as pressing as the national question. Michael Davitt and John Devoy, Fenians who had been based

[2] *Connaught Telegraph*, 26 April 1879.
[3] Poster for Irishtown meeting (National Archives of Ireland, Chief Secretary's Office Registered Papers, 1879/8039).

in Britain and New York respectively, instigated the New Departure, making overtures to the charismatic young Home Rule MP, Charles Stewart Parnell as early as 1878.

Davitt was arrested in 1870 while purchasing arms, convicted of treason felony and sentenced to fifteen years hard labour. He later claimed that he conceived the idea for the New Departure while in prison. Following his release on ticket of leave he travelled to Mayo in January 1878, where he received a hero's welcome and was greeted with banners and processions. On this trip he met with James Daly, proprietor of the *Connaught Telegraph* and an instrumental figure in the Land War, for the first time.[4] According to T.W. Moody, many Fenians, including John O'Connor Power, Patrick Egan, and Matt Harris, had adopted an attitude of 'friendly neutrality' to the Home Rule movement at its genesis in 1870 and had given support to Isaac Butt in November 1873 when he founded the Home Rule League as a national movement. Moody identified this as the first of three 'new departures' from Fenian orthodoxy that took place in the 1870s. MPs elected in the 1874 election, the first election to utilise the secret ballot, who were connected to the Fenians included O'Connor Power, Joseph Biggar and Frank Hugh O'Donnell, all of whom participated alongside Parnell in the policy of parliamentary obstruction.[5] In 1876, however, some Fenians began to express their disdain for Home Rule and many militant Fenians viewed O'Connor Power with particular contempt.

The second New Departure that Moody identified was articulated by Davitt and Devoy in late 1878 in a series of speeches, telegrams and articles. It was a programme for comprehensive cooperation between Fenians and Home Rulers that

[4] *Connaught Telegraph,* 26 January and 2 February 1878.
[5] Moody, *Davitt*, pp 131-2.

favoured Parnell as potential leader of the Home Rule movement. It sought to separate the demand for self-government from the demands of the Catholic Church.[6] However, a meeting of the IRB supreme council in Paris, in January 1879, rejected the New Departure as, according to Mark Ryan, they 'felt it would ruin the Fenian organisation, divert the energies of our members into the Parliamentary movement, and lower their national ideals.'[7] Ryan clashed with Davitt and seems to have developed particular animosity for O'Connor Power. Further meetings between Parnell, Davitt and Devoy focused on the land issue and this formed the basis of the third New Departure. It was launched at the Irishtown meeting of 20 April 1879. The Irish-based section of the IRB did not support the land movement but, on 3 May 1879, they agreed to allow Fenians to participate on an individual basis. Ryan, like many Fenian purists, 'felt that the Land League movement was purely agrarian in character and likely to obscure the much more important question of national freedom.'[8] However, the large number of Fenians active in the movement showed that most did not share these reservations. Antecedents to the New Departure and the Land League included the Ballinasloe Tenants Defence Association founded in 1876 and the Mayo Tenants Defence Association founded in 1878, which involved nationalists from across the political spectrum.[9] Matt Harris, Fenian and founder of the Ballinasloe Tenants Defence Association, 'was determined to construct an effective lay leadership in order to challenge clerical zeal, the unrepresentative nature of aristocratic politicians and the opportunism of merchants who were primarily interested in "respectability" rather than the alleviation of poverty'.[10]

[6] Ibid., pp 249-53.
[7] Ryan, *Fenian Memories*, p. 64.
[8] Ibid. p. 103.
[9] Moody, *Davitt*, pp 271 and 287-8.
[10] Brian Casey, 'Matt Harris and the Irish Land Question, 1876–1882', *Rural History*, 25 (2014), p. 186.

James Daly did much of the organising work for the Irishtown meeting and the remainder of the organisers were primarily Fenians. According to T.W. Moody, it was 'Davitt's genius for a swift, imaginative response to the challenge presented by the Irishtown situation that gave distinctive voice to a spontaneous local effort.'[11] Paul Bew believes that a 'Land League of some kind is conceivable without the New Departure background, but it would have been a very different movement-characterised by an entirely different relationship between leadership and followers.'[12] The emphasis on making those who worked the land its owners truly distinguished the Land War from its predecessors and, according to J.J. Lee, 'the Land League not merely articulated, but largely created, that aspiration, legitimised it with an immaculate pedigree by which the tenants acquired retrospective private shares in a mythical Gaelic garden of Eden, and pushed it through to within sight of ultimate victory.'[13] The use of historical precedent was a familiar theme in nationalist agitation and one which Bourke himself emphasised in his 1882 *Plea for the Evicted Tenants of Mayo.* This tradition became so ingrained in Irish political thought that even socialists such as Michael Davitt and James Connolly sought to identify historical bases for common ownership of property through skewed interpretations of ancient Irish social structures.[14]

Monster meetings were the principal tool of the Land League and the sheer enormity of these demonstrations highlighted the level of support the movement had. Michael Davitt calculated that 69 protest meetings were held in 1879 with attendance ranging from 2,000 to 25,000 people, although the nationalist press often reported

[11] Moody, *Davitt*, p. 285.
[12] Paul Bew, *Land and the National Question in Ireland, 1858-82* (Dublin, 1978), p. 73.
[13] J.J. Lee, *The Modernisation of Irish Society, 1848-1918* (Dublin, 1973), p. 95.
[14] Michael Davitt, *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland: or The Story of the Land League Revolution* (London and New York, 1904); James Connolly, *Labour in Irish History* (Dublin, 1910).

higher figures. He totalled the attendance at all meetings for the year as 607,000 on foot and 12,000 on horseback. The number of meetings in 1880 exceeded this and even Davitt seems to have lost track of them, but one meeting in the Phoenix Park reputedly attracted a crowd of 80,000.[15] Other Land League tactics included resistance to evictions, boycotting, withholding rent, and relief for victims of evictions. The new movement existed outside the template of previous tenant right movements and had commenced without consulting the clergy. They were conspicuous in their absence at the early meetings and in the first months of the campaign considerable tension existed between the clergy and the leaders of the agitation. As the campaign progressed, and the clergy became more involved and served as a voice of moderation.

## The Clergy, Fenians, and Elections

Conflict between the clergy and the cadre of the land movement in Mayo was not without precedent. The election of 1874 and the candidacy of John O'Connor Power, who had just left St Jarlath's, had proved divisive and the clerical opposition to O'Connor Power had led to acrimony. O'Connor Power was something of an innovator, having in 1873 persuaded the Supreme Council of the IRB to give cautious support to the Irish Home Rule League and, according to Michael Davitt, he waged a one man New Departure at an early stage.[16] His election committee was overwhelmingly Fenian and in his memoir Mark Ryan said Fenians involved in the campaign included himself, Thomas Brennan, P.W. Nally and Matt Harris, chairman

[15] Notebook belonging to Michael Davitt (Trinity College Dublin, manuscripts and archives, Davitt papers, 9530).

[16] Davitt, *The Fall of Feudalism*, p. 146; Donald Jordan, *Land and Popular Politics in Ireland: County Mayo from the Plantation to the Land War* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 188.

of the election committee.[17] While the clergy and Fenians had both supported Captain John Philip Nolan in the Galway election of 1872 the level of clerical interference had been abhorrent to many Fenians, including Harris, and they were encouraged to provide an alternative leadership. [18]

The manner in which Nolan secured the support of the clergy is worthy of note. Nolan had first sought election in 1870 and approached a family friend, Fr Patrick Duggan, for support. Duggan refused to support his candidature unless he participated in arbitration with twelve families who had been evicted from his estate.[19] In 1871 a court of arbitration, consisting of Sir John Gray, MP, A.M. Sullivan and Fr Patrick Lavelle, reinstated the tenants of Captain Nolan, who had been evicted in 1864 and 1866 by his agent, the first evictions coming five years before Nolan reached the age of majority. The first set of evictions had ostensibly occurred because of prohibited subdivision while the second had been when the estate was let to a single tenant, William Murphy of Oughterard.[20] The arbitration brought about a satisfactory result and in the 1872 by-election, Duggan, now Bishop of Clonfert, lent his support, as did Bishop MacEvilly, and Archbishop MacHale. While this highlights that MacEvilly was by no means apolitical, MacHale's statement of support for Nolan was unambiguous. He said Nolan had not participated in the 1870 election as the clergy had advised him not to stand for a contested seat, but had promised support in future elections. MacHale believed Nolan had since 'earned fresh claims to the support of the tenant' as well as the 'enmity of the

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17 Mark Ryan, *Fenian Memories* (Dublin, 1945), p. 44

18 Brian Casey 'Land, politics and religion on the Clancarty estate, east Galway, 1851-1914' (PhD, NUIM, 2011), p. 130.

19 C. J. Woods, 'Nolan, John Philip', in James McGuire and James Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish Biography*. (Cambridge, 2009). (http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a6224) [Accessed 2014/03/18].

20 *Tuam News*, 2 June 1871.

landlord class' and claimed Nolan's 'youthful indiscretions' had been the result of 'the cupidity of evil counsellors'.[21]

MacHale offered a stark warning to other parliamentary aspirants and advised the Tory candidate, Captain Le Poer Trench, 'not to disturb the peace of the county by a contest with Captain Nolan, a contest in which he could not hope to win but by the unconstitutional coercion of the Catholic constituents, who form the great mass of the Galway electorate.'[22] As with the election of George Henry Moore in 1857, the clergy showed themselves willing to support a candidate to the point that charges of electoral interference were brought. Despite Nolan's comprehensive victory — 2,823 votes compared to Trench's 658 votes — Trench lodged a petition decrying the role of clergy in the election, which Judge William Nicholas Keogh validated and he wholeheartedly denounced the bishops involved. Keogh, although he began his political career as the only Irish Catholic Tory MP, had subscribed to independent opposition and then abandoned it to take a position in government in 1852.[23] MacHale had been one of the few bishops to condemn his actions. Nolan was unseated but regained his seat in 1874. An interesting postscript to the 1872 election was that despite the *Tuam News* vigorously supporting Nolan in both the election and his court case, their electoral support did not come without a price. When the *Galway Vindicator* sued Nolan for unpaid costs arising from his campaign the *Irish Times* reported that John MacPhilpin also intended to sue for £1,000. MacPhilpin challenged some particulars of the article but not his intention to sue, or the sum of

[21] Ibid., 28 July 1871.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Desmond McCabe, 'Keogh, William Nicholas', in McGuire and Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish Biography*. (Cambridge, 2009). (http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a4516) [accessed 2015/03/18].

£1,000.[24] The case seems to have never come to court but Daly later used this alleged bill against Bourke, MacPhilpin, and the *Tuam News.*

The 1872 *entente* between Fenians and priests did not last until the 1874 election. Although O'Connor Power was eventually elected despite clerical opposition, not all the clergy opposed him initially. Bourke and, significantly, MacHale had at first supported his candidacy. However, in a clear indication of his waning influence, MacHale found himself outmanoeuvred by the clergy of Mayo, which included the dioceses of Killala and Achonry as well as parts of Tuam. A quarter century of Cullen's influence had meant that even MacHale's own metropolitan area had become inhabited by bishops and priests hostile to him. O'Connor Power's candidacy and the support of the clergy had seemed certain, at least to himself. The clergy met in Castlebar to endorse candidates and all three potential Home Rule candidates agreed to be bound by the decision.[25] John MacEvilly recounted the proceedings of the meeting (second hand) to Paul Cullen in extracts from a letter of a Mayo priest:

> The archbishop came from Tuam accompanied by his cousin, Rev. U. Burke (sic), to promote the candidature of madman Power, the Fenian. But thanks to the stand made by Dr (Hugh) Conway (Bishop of Killala) and all the priests of the county here, he was obliged to set *him aside.* He could not conceal his humiliation by his embarrassed manner, nervous and choking voice.[26]

[24] *Tuam News*, 14 February 1873.

[25] Cunningham, *St Jarlath's College*, pp 102 and 106; *Freeman's Journal,* 30 Jan. 1874; Ryan, *Fenian Memories*, p. 41; Donald Jordan, 'John O'Connor Power, Charles Stewart Parnell and the Centralisation of Popular Politics in Ireland', *Irish Historical Studies,* Vol. 25, No. 97 (May 1986), p. 50.

[26] Jordan, 'O'Connor Power and Parnell', p. 51.

This statement gives some indication of the tone of the meeting. A central figure in opposing O'Connor Power was Fr Patrick Lavelle and the one time radical priest alienated most of his traditional supporters including the Fenians, the Irish in England, and MacHale himself.[27] Although an advanced nationalist, Lavelle intensely disliked O'Connor Power and perpetuated rumours about his parentage and background. In keeping with the decision of the clergy, and as per his agreement with Bourke who had nominated him, O'Connor Power withdrew from the contest. Clerical opposition to Power proved unpopular and, despite the fact that MacHale had initially supported him, he found himself 'hooted' at during the campaign, as did Lavelle.[28] Thomas Tighe and George Browne were elected unopposed but O'Connor Power received a second chance to stand, thanks to the actions of Sir George O'Donnel, who challenged the result as he felt the sheriff had rejected his nomination on insufficient grounds.[29] His appeal was successful and a by-election was called, but this time no selection convention was called by MacHale.

That O'Connor Power did not have to seek the nomination of the clergy did not mean he was spared their opposition. In spite of this, he was elected and this challenge to clerical influence in many ways set a precedent for the Land War.[30] Although Bourke had given his initial support to O'Connor Power it does not represent support for Fenianism. From Bourke's point of view, to have a St Jarlath's alumnus elected to Parliament would significantly boost the profile of the college. Moreover, O'Connor Power had, in St Jarlath's, shown an unbridled enthusiasm for the more theatrical elements of cultural nationalism. In 1874 O'Connor Power was

[27] Moran, *Fr Patrick Lavelle*, pp 144-51.
[28] Jordan, 'O'Connor Power and Parnell', p. 51.
[29] *Freeman's Journal,* 18 February 1874.
[30] Jordan, *Land and Popular Politics*, p. 238.

still a Fenian but had begun to moderate his politics, which led to his eventual ostracisation from the Fenians and later he joined the Liberal party. Bourke may not only have been aware of O'Connor Power's changing ideology, but may have been responsible for it.

## The Emergence of Division

Despite the aversion of many Fenians to agrarian agitation, the Fenian movement in Connaught had an especially strong agrarian bent. This found expression in the establishment of the Ballinasloe Tenants Defence Association in 1876. Many of those involved were Fenians who had participated in the election campaigns of Nolan in Galway in 1872 and O'Connor Power in Mayo in 1874; there was little clerical involvement.[31] This development provided a template for the early stages of the Land War. In the *Social Origins of the Irish Land War* Samuel Clark states that the lay leadership of the Land League consisted to a large degree of shopkeepers who had an interest in ensuring that tenants paid their bills, and they were socially well-positioned to provide leadership and direction.[32] From this a conflict arose with the clergy who saw themselves as the natural leaders of the people. Not only had the clergy been absent from the Irishtown meeting, a police report of the meeting stated they had opposed it and one unnamed local cleric was said to have offered £5 to anybody who would destroy the platform built for the speakers.[33]

[31] Casey, 'Clancarty', pp 135 and 141.
[32] Samuel Clark, *Social Origins of the Irish Land War* (Princeton, 1979) pp 124-32.
[33] Police report on Irishtown meeting (NAI, CSORP 1879/8039).

As the Land League grew in popularity and power many clergymen came to support and even participate in it, but often for pragmatic, rather than ideological, reasons. Writing to Monsignor Tobias Kirby, rector of the Irish College in Rome, John MacEvilly said, 'In order to meet this evil and knock the wind out of the sails of those unprincipled ringleaders, it has been deemed prudent for the priests to formulate resolutions at meetings in the interests of order and religion, to keep the lead and keep the Godless nobodies in their place'.[34] The actions of Bourke and other clergy of the archdiocese of Tuam who became involved in the agitation seem to indicate that they followed this course. The meeting at Claremorris on 13 July 1879 was the largest to that point, with 20,000 people present, and it had the distinction of being the first meeting to feature priests on the platform. Bourke played no small role in this development, but his actions in the run up to the meeting and the attitudes he expressed on the day leave his motives open to question. James Daly, who was central to organising the Irishtown meeting and acted as its chair, was especially unwelcoming of Bourke's newfound desire to participate.

Between the Irishtown and Claremorris meetings, a rift seemed to develop between priests and people. MacHale, in particular, vocally opposed the new movement and on 7 June 1879, the day before a meeting in Westport, he published a letter in the *Freeman's Journal*. He stated that the sympathies of the clergy lay with the people but warned against 'night patrolling, acts and words of menace, with arms in hand, the profanation of all that is sacred in religion.' He stated that such events were organised 'by a few designing men' who 'seek only to promote their personal interests'.[35] In reporting on the Westport meeting the *Freeman's Journal,* after

[34] Bew, *Land and the National Question*, p. 68.
[35] *Freeman's Journal,* 7 June 1879.

detailing the effect of the weather in keeping many away, stated that 'a more serious drawback was the letter of his Grace the Archbishop, published in yesterday's "Freeman" which came upon the committee as a great surprise'. On taking the platform Charles Stewart Parnell referred directly to MacHale's letter. He said it would 'ill become him or, anybody else, to treat anything proceeding from a man who had stood as his Grace had between the Irish people and the exterminator, with anything but the highest respect'. However, he claimed that while the meeting had been advertised with placards throughout Mayo for the previous six or seven weeks, only on the previous day had he been made aware of MacHale's opposition. Parnell claimed that 'during all these weeks not a single person in Mayo or out of it, no clergyman ever intimated to him that the Archbishop was opposed to the meeting'. The *Freeman's Journal* also carried a letter from James Daly, written in response to MacHale, in which he expressed his 'astonishment and deep regret' at reading the archbishop's letter and stating that he would not attend a meeting that 'had the slightest tendency to advocating irreligion or revolutionary ideas'. Daly referred respectfully to the archbishop and implied that perhaps somebody had misled him as to the nature of the movement. However, the conclusion of the letter carried a barb that reinforced much of what was said at various meetings: 'It is deplorable to see the priests and the people disunited; but to use a phrase expressed on more than one occasion by his Grace, "It will not be the fault of the faithful people"'.[36]

While MacHale conducted his frontal assault on the movement, Bourke and his colleagues in the Deanery of Claremorris pursued a different course. A resolution dated 29 May and signed by Bourke, Archdeacon Bartholomew Cavanagh of Knock, and Canon Geoffrey Bourke, among others, was printed in the *Connaught Telegraph*

[36] *Freeman's Journal*, 9 Jun. 1879.

and reproduced by the *Nation* and *Freeman's Journal.* This resolution claimed that the 'distressed state' of the farmers of the country arose 'in part from bad seasons and partly from the great fall in agricultural and pastoral produce' and called for a reduction of rents in order to promote harmony between tenants and landlords.[37] While this may not represent as blatant an attempt to undermine the movement as MacHale's letter, its tone and diagnosis of the causes of the distress of farmers, as well as its extremely moderate solution, fell well short of what the tens of thousands of people at monster meetings desired. Agrarian agitation occurred in Bourke's own parish and deanery and a short article in the same paper documented a meeting of around 2,000 tenant farmers in Claremorris demanding a reduction of rent. On 28 June, the *Connaught Telegraph* featured a letter from the tenants of Charles Ormsby Blake, refuting accusations he made in several newspapers that they had been sworn in to secret societies or had threatened a process officer or ejectment server. The letter stated that the tenants withheld their rents as they had nearly doubled in the space of eight years. The letter was signed in the presence of prominent tenant right activists and Fenians, P.J. Gordon, J.W. Nally and 'others'.[38]

## Archdeacon Cavanagh

At the Special Commission on Parnellism and Crime it was claimed that when Bourke initially opposed the Land War he had his fences and crops damaged in retaliation.[39] If this is true, at least he was spared the very public humiliation that Archdeacon Cavanagh suffered. He had a protest meeting directed at him in his own

[37] *Connaught Telegraph*, 31 May 1879; *Freeman's Journal*, 9 June 1879.
[38] *Connaught Telegraph,* 28 June 1879.
[39] Jordan, *Land and Popular Politics,* p. 238.

parish on 1 June 1879. Therefore, the releasing of the Claremorris statement, just three days before the protest was to take place, was hardly a coincidence. Likewise, this protest may have played a role in stimulating MacHale to write his letter denouncing the movement. The *Connaught Telegraph* claimed that 15,000 people attended a meeting 'to enter a solemn and emphatic protest against the language used by the Venerable Archdeacon Kavanagh (sic) from the altar of the parish church the previous Sunday'. According to the *Connaught* Telegraph, when the tenant farmers attempted to arrange a tenant-right meeting Cavanagh had moved to suppress it 'for the purpose of shielding certain landlords who were not inclined to accede to the just and reasonable demands of their tenants'. The language used at the meeting, while not inflammatory, was firm and underlined a commitment to the agitation regardless of the attitudes of the clergy. The chair of the meeting, Tobias Merick, 'a respectable tenant farmer', stated that 'he hoped the day would never come that the priests and the people would be found in opposite camps but if such occurs it will not be the people's fault'.[40] They sought conciliation with the clergy, but on the terms that clergy reconcile themselves to the agitation.

Conflict between priests and parishioners was not without precedent and a former resident of Knock claimed that a strike had taken place against the priests of the parish in the 1830s or 40s over what were believed to be excessive fees charged by them.[41] The protest against Cavanagh underscores the tensions between the clergy and the people. Eugene Hynes has pointed out that Cavanagh's denunciation from the altar actually contravened the Synod of Thurles and points to him being a traditional priest whose habits 'reflected the thinking of earlier generations of priests that

[40] *Connaught Telegraph,* 7 June 1879.
[41] The Diary of Daniel Campbell, p. 18. A copy of this document is available on request in the museum at Knock shrine; it is not part of the archive and has no call number.

emphasised external behaviour more than interior spirituality, public shame rather than private guilt.'[42] Cavanagh's lack of tact in his declarations from the pulpit give some indication of his character. While Cavanagh perhaps helped to widen the gulf between priests and people, from this point on Bourke began to make his overtures to those participating in agitation and attempted, for a variety of reasons, to reinstate the clergy at the head of the people. Likewise, Cavanagh overcame his hostility to the movement and later participated in protest meetings.

Cavanagh's denunciation has been problematic for those who attempt to portray the Knock apparition as a message of solidarity from the Blessed Virgin to an oppressed people. Monsignor Michael Walsh's account, first published in 1955, demonstrated how in the development of the narrative of Knock the apparition and the plight of tenant farmers had become inextricably linked. After outlining, somewhat inaccurately, the beginning of the Land War he said that news of the apparition

> was received with great enthusiasm by the people in general, and was a consolation to many in their trials. It was perhaps no surprise that Our Lady should show a special honour to Ireland, a country that had been for long ages a shining light in the Church, and whose people had displayed such fervent devotion to the Mass and the Rosary in times of persecution and distress.[43]

The Knock revivalist William Coyne (Liam Úa Cadhain) made some fantastic leaps in stretching his narrative to portray Cavanagh in as positive a light as possible. Writing in the early 1950s, and subscribing to a narrative of a Catholic Ireland where

[42] Hynes, *Knock*, p. 121.
[43] Coyne, *Archdeacon Cavanagh* p. 53.

the struggles for religious and national freedom were synonymous, Coyne portrayed the Church as consistently sympathetic to popular protest. He explained clerical opposition to Fenianism by stating that around the time of the apparition there had been a split in the IRB with one group supportive of the Catholic Church and the other in opposition to it. He claimed the latter ‘argued that the church had no right to interfere in what they called “their politics,” and denounced the clergy as deadly foes of Irish nationality’. Coyne took considerable liberties with historical fact in constructing his narrative. He presented an equally spurious account of the French landing at Killala in 1798 and claimed the 'French revolutionary government sent help for their own ends, to found an atheistic masonic Republic, and then abandoned the Irish to the English. Innocent young men joined secret societies unaware of the atheistic (Free)masonry behind them.' He explained the existence of secret societies by stating: 'When it is remembered that the political upheaval in the life of the French Nation was part of the considered plan of world Freemasonry it will come as no surprise that Ribbonmen appeared in Ireland within a short period after the bloodbath of Paris.'[44]

Given his unique approach to facts and bias towards the church, many of his claims deserve little credence. He detailed the suffering of Irish people at the hands of landlords but gave an account of the Land League that highlighted its moderation. He suggested that 'outside agitators’ and secret societies were rife in the west of Ireland. He claimed secret meetings were organised and ‘the district of Knock was selected as a place that required attention, particularly so because Fr Cavanagh was preaching caution and restraint to his flock.' According to Coyne, it was decided to issue Cavanagh with threats and then cut off his ears. A local member of the secret

[44] Ibid. pp 33, 47-9.

society objected, but was reminded he had sworn an oath. Coyne claimed that after the apparition took place local members of the secret society took courage and opposed the attack on Cavanagh. He said they 'called together their friends in the parish and proclaimed they would rally round the pastor, regardless of consequences to themselves and challenge any man to touch him.'[45] As a result, according to Coyne, the priest's ears were spared and the parish saved from the stain of a dreadful crime against a holy man. That Coyne does not record the actual protest against Cavanagh, but instead attempts to link opposition to him to outside agitators, freemasonry, and atheism, indicates the uncomfortable fact of Cavanagh's initial opposition to a movement now generally viewed in a positive light.

## James Daly and the *Connaught Telegraph*

While James Daly dealt with MacHale's opposition to the Land War somewhat tactfully, he took a less cautious approach to Ulick Bourke and the *Tuam News*. Prior to the Claremorris meeting, in his weekly column dated 28 June 1879, Daly accused Bourke of planning to nominate a candidate in opposition to O'Connor Power for the following year's parliamentary election. This person was the Catholic landlord Walter Bourke, a barrister recently returned from India. Prior to his departure he had contested a seat in Tralee and his foray into politics in 1880, as I demonstrate later in this chapter, may indeed have been connected to Bourke. Daly stated that as 'Father Bourke has declared in the *Tuam News* that the people of Mayo want a leader, and as he insinuates that he is prepared to give them one, or to lead them himself, it is of importance to consider what his views on the land question

[45] Ibid. p. 73.

are'. The previous Sunday at a meeting at Mayo Plains P.J. Gordon had taken the dramatic step of tearing up a copy of the *Tuam News* which contained the offending article and claimed that during the 1876 election MacPhilpin had attempted to bribe O'Connor Power to stand aside.[46] Unfortunately no copies of the *Tuam News* containing Bourke's letter survive but Daly accused Bourke of 'base treachery' and 'cowardly deceit' and claimed that he had referred to those leading the movement as 'dangerous agitators'. According to Daly, Bourke organised the meeting not 'to advocate the repeal of barbarous land laws, nor to assert the right of the people of Ireland to the land of Ireland; but as Father Burke (sic) has expressed it – "to unite the priests and people, tenant farmers and those *in higher positions*"' (emphasis in original). Daly went on to claim that Bourke aimed 'to re-forge the chains of the poor, toiling, starving, tenantry' and hand them 'back, once more, captive to the power and dominion of the landlord'.[47]

The *Connaught Telegraph* of 5 July did not include any response from Bourke, but it did contain a letter from John MacPhilpin that accused Daly of 'dealing in no ordinary terms of severity upon the *Tuam News*'. MacPhilpin denied that the newspaper was insensitive to the suffering of tenants and stated: 'we believe that the tenants are, as a body, cruelly and unjustly treated by the landlords; and no one will hail with greater pleasure agitation in their favour than we'. He accused the *Connaught Telegraph* of misrepresenting Bourke's words regarding the agitation and landlords and said: 'It is only the reasoning of children or of simple people who would consider any man responsible for the opinions put forward in any paper'.

[46] *Connaught Telegraph,* 28 June 1879.
[47] *Connaught Telegraph,* 28 June 1879.

However, when MacPhilpin outlined the position of the *Tuam News* on the agitation, he was far from conciliatory towards the leaders:

> The *Tuam News* does not wish to see, even in the case of tenant right, a meeting held on a Sunday close by the chapel-yard gate of any parish, in opposition and counter to the expressed wish of the priest of the parish. It does not wish to see the national leaders of the people set aside and other self-styled leaders putting themselves in their place.[48]

The following week's *Connaught Telegraph* appeared on 12 July 1879, the day before the Claremorris meeting. In it Daly maintained his offensive, but his animosity had a new focus. The paper published another letter from John MacHale denouncing the agitation and a response from Michael Davitt. If MacPhilpin had expected anything by way of an apology from Daly he was disappointed. Daly expressed his disappointment at MacPhilpin's lack of 'apology for his open denunciation of the tenants' cause- a denunciation with which he has irreverently connected to *all that remains* (emphasis mine) of the great Archbishop of Tuam'. Daly referred to MacPhilpin's letter as a 'rambling document ... to exculpate himself, his newspaper, and the gentleman who exploits them both'. However, far from portraying MacPhilpin as a duped innocent, Daly went on to level various charges against him including using his newspaper to launch attacks against John MacEvilly and attempting to charge Nolan £1,000 for coverage of the 1872 election. In response to MacPhilpin's question as to why priests had been absent from platforms, he said: 'The priests of this diocese are no longer free... a single individual, with what authority we know not, claims the right to put them to silence'. Daly placed this

[48] *Connaught Telegraph,* 5 July 1879.

blame squarely on the shoulders of the Reverend Thomas MacHale, accusing him of being an outsider and a reactionary and that, 'unfortunately his Grace, owing to the natural decay of years is no longer able to perform the functions of his high and sacred position. These functions it would appear, now devolve to his nephew, the Vicar-General.'[49]

This charge of manipulation against Thomas MacHale appeared frequently at the time and it persisted with those who sought to defend John MacHale's reputation, or refused to accept that their beloved patriot bishop would oppose what they perceived as a just cause. However, while John MacHale was advanced in years, aged between 88 and 90 in 1879 (depending on which date of birth you believe), he maintained a reasonable level of activity in his later years. Fr Kieran Waldron's sympathetic portrayal of MacHale, which omits mention of the Land War, states that 'even as late as 1881 (the year of his death), MacHale still presided at the liturgies of Holy Week.'[50] Eugene Hynes points out that in the week of the Knock apparition MacHale administered confirmation in Clifden, a considerable distance from Tuam and was reported as in good health.[51] Neither ill health nor land agitation prevented MacHale from travelling to Dublin on 24 June 1879, when he unveiled a statue of the late John Gray on Sackville Street. In a rather brief speech, he said: 'Immoral and illegal combination disowned by right reason and reprobated by religion must not be enlisted in the service of the country. They would be auxiliaries entirely unsuited to so sacred a cause as the social regeneration of Ireland.' That is not to say, however, that no evidence exists of his advanced years affecting his energies. The *Nation*

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49 *Connaught Telegraph,* 12 Jul. 1879.
50 Kieran Waldron, *The Archbishops of Tuam 1700-2000* (Tuam, 2008), p. 58.
51 Hynes, *Knock,* p. 309 n. 156.

reported he was unable to attend the reception in Dublin that evening due to fatigue.[52]

Attacks on Bourke were absent from Daly's column of 12 July 1879, with his ire now focused on Thomas MacHale, but he did say that if MacPhilpin and Bourke could use their influence on 'Dr MacHale Junior, to restrain him from writing coercive letters on political matters to clergymen of this diocese, there would be not further occasion to comment upon the absence of the priests from the side of the tillers of the soil.'[53] Whatever compromise had been made, Daly no longer seemed to view the forthcoming meeting with suspicion or to question the motives of the clergy who would attend. Instead, Thomas MacHale became the scapegoat for any misunderstanding between clergy and people. This is not to suggest that Daly maintained a consistent argument. His assault briefly turned back in its original direction when he asked of MacPhilpin, 'Does the Editor, then, say that immoral combinations do exist? Does he agree with his Grace and with Lord Oranmore that Mayo is "honeycombed with secret societies"?'[54]

This issue of the *Connaught Telegraph* also reproduced a letter signed by John MacHale, dated 7 July and originally published in the *Freeman's Journal* of 10 July. It addressed the organisers of a meeting in Ballyhaunis who had invited him to attend and said, 'let the tenant farmers of Mayo, as of all Ireland, act judiciously; let them be guided, as of old, by their faithful allies, the priests... Let no attempt at severing so sacred a union, fraught with blessings to the people be tolerated'. This

52 *Nation,* 28 June 1879.
53 *Connaught Telegraph,* 12 July 1879.
54 *Connaught Telegraph,* 12 July 1879; *Freeman's Journal,* 10 July 1879.

letter indicates why Daly would not want to believe, or at least would prefer others not to believe, that it was written by John MacHale. It went on to say:

> In some parts of the country the people, in calmer moments, will not fail to be astonished at the circumstance of finding themselves at the tail of a few unknown strolling men who, with affected grief, deploring the condition of the tenantry, seek only to mount to place and preferment on the shoulders of the people; and should they succeed in their ambitious designs, they would not hesitate to shake aside at once the interest of their advancement as an unprofitable encumbrance.[55]

Eugene Hynes, amongst others, has pointed out that 'MacHale's letter was consistent with the views he had expressed over the decades, that priests and the landlords they supported were the natural leaders of the Catholic laity.'[56]

While Daly obviously knew of this letter, reprinting it as he did in his newspaper, he made no allusion to it in his own column. Instead it appeared on the same page as a letter from Michael Davitt written in response. Davitt addressed his letter to the editor of the *Connaught Telegraph,* perhaps the most logical place to send it as MacHale had heaped praise upon the editors of the *Nation* and *Freeman's Journal* in his own letter. Davitt trod lightly, saying:

> There are few men among our seemingly destiny-divided people who would not prefer to lie under an unmerited rebuke or remain silent to even uncalled for aspersions upon their motives or actions rather than utter a single word in defence that might irritate or offend the venerated Archbishop of Tuam.

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55 Ibid.
56 Hynes, *Knock,* p. 309, n. 156.

However, Davitt went on to defend himself from the accusations in the archbishop's letter and denied being a 'strolling' or 'unknown' man, pointing to the fact that his own family had been evicted from their farm in Mayo. Davitt also argued that as he had been convicted of treason felony and was on ticket of leave, continued imprisonment was the only 'advancement' he was likely to achieve for his efforts on behalf of the tenantry. The column next to Davitt's letter carried another opinion piece attacking MacHale's letter, where, tellingly, the author said, 'the resolutions of even some of the deaneries are a sham for has not the placehunting spirit before now affected the priesthood'.[57] Davitt must not have felt that a mere letter constituted an adequate response to MacHale's attacks and, in what could be interpreted as a direct challenge, he organised a protest in Tuam in September 1879 without consulting either the religious or civic authorities. Writing in *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland,* Davitt said the purpose of this protest was 'to put an end to the idea that an Irish archbishop or English chief secretary was strong enough to frown down such a movement or turn its leaders from the object upon which they had embarked. This was, for the time being, an end of clerical opposition.'[58]

## Archbishop MacHale as Landlord

John MacHale's opposition to the Land War surprised many. As demonstrated in the previous chapter his patriotic pronouncements were more frequent than his political actions, but he readily gave vocal support to popular campaigns and had spoken in favour of tenant right. His reasons for opposing the

[57] *Connaught Telegraph,* 12 July 1879
[58] Davitt, *Fall of Feudalism*, p. 159.

movement were multifaceted and included a fear of it undermining the authority of the clergy and traditional nationalist leaders. His refusal, or inability, to condemn landlordism as an institution is unsurprising, as Catholic landlords were seen as providing leadership. As already outlined, support for Irish nationhood did not equate with a desire to overturn the social order. However, MacHale's personal interest in landlordism extended beyond a desire to maintain the status quo. He himself purchased thousands of acres of land and held them as his own personal property. It would be a gross simplification to say that MacHale's opposition to the Land War was entirely due to his own, not insignificant, holdings but it would likewise be erroneous to say they had no bearing. MacHale's status as landlord was not only unreported at the time but has remained absent from all literature dealing with the Land War since. MacHale not only personally profited from landlordism but, for the archdiocese of Tuam, and for various religious orders, landlordism was viewed as a legitimate means of fundraising. While Bourke himself does not appear to have had landed interests, the Catholic Church both supported landlordism and operated as a landlord, while many individual clerics owned land in a personal capacity.

MacHale's estates first came to light in Fr Kieran Waldron's 2008 book, *The Archbishops of Tuam 1700-2000.* Waldron's source was an undated document written by one of MacHale's successors, Joseph Walsh, Archbishop of Tuam from 1940 to 1969. Walsh believes that despite the positive light in which MacHale was viewed, 'if anybody examines fully his work as administrator of the diocese, it seems to me there will not be much enthusiasm.' He outlines a litany of abuses including money for masses 'diverted to a different purpose' and he criticises MacHale's education policies, in particular his attitudes towards the university question and the

national schools system. Walsh claims that during MacHale's tenure there had been a poor standard of education and a lack of religious knowledge among the people in the diocese. Other criticisms include the poor records kept, at both diocesan and parish level, the appointment of Thomas MacHale as vicar general and the poor relationship between MacHale and MacEvilly. This document also states that MacHale was a 'real despot'.[59] Walsh added that MacHale owned hundreds of acres of land which he rented out. The significance of this information, however, either escaped Fr Waldron or he chose to ignore it, preferring to present an uncritical portrayal of MacHale and implausible reasons as to why he might have needed this land. The NUI Galway Landed Estates database gives an even more complete picture of MacHale's holdings, claiming he owned 1,226 acres in the parish of Achill, Co. Mayo, which he bought in the Encumbered Estates Court in 1854. In addition, at the time of the landowners' survey of 1876, a catalogue of all holdings compiled to calculate rates, he held 2,048 acres in County Galway. [60]

The Encumbered Estates Acts of 1848 and '49 enabled cash strapped landowners to sell their properties by simplifying the question of title. Unlike later land acts, which transferred ownership from landlords to tenants, these acts merely facilitated a change of landlord by forcing the sale of insolvent estates to the highest bidder. They did, however, lead to a new type of landlord, as those who could afford to buy land were often people who had made their money in business, industry, or law. The new middle class obtained land not by title or royal decree, but through cash transaction, and many were Catholic. Despite the oft-repeated assertion that

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59 Waldron, *Archbishops of Tuam,* pp 52-4.

60 Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, Marie Boran & Brigid Clesham, 'NUI Galway, Landed estates Database' (cited 2013/04/14) http://landedestates.nuigalway.ie:8080/LandedEstates/jsp/family-show.jsp?id=1725

Thomas MacHale absconded with all of the archbishop's papers, there is a huge amount of evidence relating to his properties in the Tuam diocesan archives, which historians have failed to utilise.

In 1855 John MacHale paid £3,200 for the estate of Cuthbert Fetherstone, which consisted of four properties: Fairy Hill, over 624 acres; Carr, over 426 acres; Fairfield and Kilmalinogue, over 653 acres; and Derryheyne South, over 570 acres.[61] The lands at Derryheyne were valued at £900 and held in a perpetual lease. [62] All of these properties were in the Barony of Longfort in County Galway.[63] Each of these four properties was rented out in its entirety and all were held on long leases ranging from three lifetimes, to 999 years, to perpetuity. These leases are extant in the diocesan archives, with at least two dating back to the eighteenth century, and at the time of their purchase these four farms brought in a combined annual income of £143.[64] The fact that the archbishop had only one tenant per property may explain why it was not known that he was a landlord.

According to Walsh, John MacHale borrowed £3,200 from different people for the purchase of these estates and he used a further £200 that he had received on trust for foundation masses. Later, he transferred Fairyhill and Carr to the Presentation Convent, Tuam, to repay a loan of £1,771.1.8. According to Walsh, MacHale claimed to have repaid all the other loans. [65] These four properties are the best documented, but do not represent the entirety of MacHale's holdings. He also owned Cloonacross, in the Barony of Dunmore, Co Galway. This estate, purchased

[61] Bill of sale (TDA, MacHale papers, B1/10-i/7).
[62] Will of Archbishop MacHale (TDA, MacHale papers, B1/10-i/1); Copy of statement of properties not held in trust furnished by Messrs Meldon and Co Upper Ormond Quay Dublin re. the Very Rev. Thomas MacHale DD Deceased (TDA, MacHale papers, B1/10-i/7).
[63] Bill of sale (TDA, MacHale Papers, B1/10-i/7).
[64] Leases and Bill of sale (TDA, MacHale papers, B1/10-i/7).
[65] Joseph Walsh, 28 July 1947, (TDA, MacHale Papers, B1/10-i/7).

in the Encumbered Estates Court in 1852, was valued at £250 and contained 271 acres of arable land and a bog of 96 acres.[66]

MacHale's estates fell into two categories: those he owned as his personal property and those held in trust. The latter group of properties were also rented out and their profits, for the most part, were used for ecclesiastical education in the diocese. However, ownership was vested in MacHale and trusteeship seems to have been nominal. Cartron in the Barony of Dunmore was one such estate, valued at £1,000 and held on a 999 year lease. In 1865 Thomas MacHale, James Waldron and James Magee were made trustees of Cartron. However, in reality the estate seems to have been run first by Thomas MacHale and then by his cousin, Fr Richard MacHale, until he passed away in 1878. The lands raised £45 per annum and John MacHale's will stated that £30 a year from this property was to go towards the support of an ecclesiastical student of the diocese, with a further £13 for masses for the repose of the soul of MacHale and his relatives.[67]

Bunnaghcurry, in Achill, was also held in trust. Funds from this estate were to be used to educate two or more students from the archdiocese in St Jarlath's, Maynooth, the Irish College, Paris, or the Irish College, Rome. [68] These lands were valued at £720 and held in perpetual lease. [69] The Achill property, along with further lands at Gurrane, was purchased in the Encumbered Estates Court in 1850, but the estate at Gurrane was later sold. In 1876 John MacHale entrusted the Achill property

[66] Will of Archbishop MacHale (TDA, MacHale papers, B1/10-i/1); Copy of statement of properties not held in trust furnished by Messrs Meldon and Co Upper Ormond Quay Dublin re. the Very Rev. Thomas MacHale DD Deceased (TDA, MacHale papers, B1/10-i/7). Short statement of trust properties re. Thomas MacHale (TDA, MacHale papers, B1/10-i/7).
[67] Ibid.
[68] Short statement of trust properties re. Thomas MacHale (TDA, MacHale papers, B1/10-i/7).
[69] Will of Archbishop MacHale (TDA, MacHale papers, B1/10-i/1). Copy of statement of Thomas MacHale properties not held in trust (TDA, MacHale papers, B1/10-i/7).

to a board consisting of Thomas MacHale, Rev James Magee and Ulick Bourke.[70] In total then, MacHale purchased at least eight properties, the smallest of which, Cloonacross, was 367 acres. By the time of his death he had sold three, leaving three as his personal property and two held in trust. However, the manner in which they were held in trust does not seem to have been clear-cut. Thomas MacHale inherited them and he had a dispute with John MacEvilly regarding their ownership.

MacEvilly attempted to wrest control of the Achill estate from Thomas MacHale but MacHale maintained that while the rents of the estate were expended for ecclesiastical education in the diocese, it was not diocesan property. [71] MacEvilly wrote to MacHale in 1885 reminding him of 'the stringent provisions of our national synod as to how ecclesiastical property is vested.'[72] The disarray of diocesan property and affairs that MacEvilly inherited was exemplified by the fact that the diocesan cross was also missing. There seems to have been an implication in MacEvilly's letter that Thomas MacHale was responsible for this too, but he claimed to know nothing about it. MacEvilly had witnesses to support the assertion that the Achill estate belonged to the diocese. Bishop Frances McCormack of Achonry and Bishop Thomas J. Carr of Galway claimed, as young curates, to have been in Achill with many other priests of the Westport Deanery, 'when the late Archbishop of Tuam, the Most Rev Dr MacHale, declared, and wished that all present should know, that the property purchased by his Grace in Achill was Diocesan property, purchased

[70] Short statement of trust properties re. Thomas MacHale (TDA, MacHale papers, B1/10-i/7).
[71] Thomas MacHale to John MacEvilly, 18 February 1885 (TDA, MacEvilly papers, B2/2-v/3).
[72] John MacEvilly to Thomas MacHale, 16 February 1885 (TDA, MacEvilly papers, B2/2-v/3).

with diocesan funds.'[73] The Achill estate was sold to the Congested Districts Board on 12 Sept 1908.[74]

The wealth John MacHale accumulated in his lifetime undermines any argument that he purchased these estates for benevolent purposes. His will, made in 1874, not only highlighted his wealth but showed that he viewed it as personal property. Apart from land, the assets of MacHale's estate included £2,629.6.2 in cash; £1,014.19.7 from life assurance; £585.3.3 worth of assets including furniture, farming stock, horses and carriages; £573.2.10 owed in outstanding rents; £216 in other debts; and stocks and shares amounting to £75, making a total of £5,244.4.8.[75] To put this in context, in the 1870s it would have taken a teacher in St Jarlath's over 100 years to earn this sum, or a labourer over 200 years. He left the vast majority of his estate to his own family, principally Thomas MacHale, although he made some charitable bequests. He left £300 to the poor of Tuam, £200 to the poor of Aughavale, Westport and £100 to the poor of his native parish, Addergoole. He left £500 to his brother Edward MacHale and £500 to his sister Barbara MacHale, on 'account of her faithful service' as his housekeeper. His sister Catherine received a mere £10, but also a harp, which for tax purposes was valued at £12, and his other sister Ellen received £250. Thomas MacHale, a student in Maynooth, was bequeathed £100 with a further £250 for his studies. The only individual to whom he was not related to benefit from his will was a Mrs Magennis, of Castlebar, who was left £200. St Jarlath's received only £100, but also inherited the archbishop's library.

[73] McCormack to MacEvilly, 5 February 1885 and Carr to MacEvilly Feast of the Purification 1885 (TDA, MacEvilly papers, B2/2-v/3).
[74] Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, Marie Boran & Brigid Clesham, 'NUI Galway, Landed estates Database' http://landedestates.nuigalway.ie:8080/LandedEstates/jsp/family-show.jsp?id=1725 [cited 2013/04/14].
[75] Inland Revenue Assessment of Duty on Estate of Archbishop MacHale (TDA, MacHale papers, B1/10-i/1).

He bequeathed the remainder of his estate to Thomas MacHale, who was appointed executor of his will.[76]

Like his uncle, Thomas MacHale administered the estates as his personal property. The best documented of these properties is Derryheyne South. When Thomas MacHale died in 1891 it, and the other properties, passed to Rev. George Campbell, who in turn left it to another priest, Rev. Thomas Morrissey. Morrissey then sold the lands to the Vincentian order for the sum of £900 and, as late as 1910, they still held the property. Income arising from it was used for the purposes of 'maintenance and education' in St Joseph's College, Blackrock, Co. Dublin.[77] Thomas MacHale was also executor of the will of Fr Peter Conway, who left all of his property to John MacHale and had owned several houses and property that brought in an annual rent of £30, showing that landlordism among the clergy, far from being confined to MacHale, was quite common.[78] Archbishop Walsh managed to secure from the Irish College in Paris a collection of letters belonging to Thomas MacHale, which had been found in his room after his death. Primarily these are letters of thanks from convents in the archdiocese for what are described as MacHale's generous contributions, usually about £20.[79] This demonstrates that Thomas MacHale used at least some of his inheritance for charitable purposes, but even if all of the money had gone to charity it shows an unwillingness to surrender control to, or to accept the authority of, Archbishop MacEvilly. In 1889, in response to repeated requests, he wrote to MacEvilly saying that having examined Archbishop MacHale's account books he found that while £77,354.10.1 had been received

[76] Will of Archbishop MacHale (TDA, MacHale papers, B1/10-i/1).
[77] Conveyance by Trustees of St Joseph's College Blackrock, 18 April 1910 (TDA, MacHale papers, B1/10-i/7).
[78] Copy of statement of Thomas MacHale properties not held in trust (TDA, MacHale papers, B1/10-i/7).
[79] Letters written to Thomas MacHale (TDA, MacEvilly papers, B2/5-i/5).

£78,093.6.8 had been distributed to charitable causes. The implication was that rather than misappropriating diocesan funds the MacHales had given away £738.16.7 extra of their own money.[80] These account books were, however, in his own possession, and have not been seen since. Even if these figures were accurate, they leave open the question of what the MacHales considered 'their' money and what they considered the diocese's.

In light of his involvement in landlordism, there are clear reasons why MacHale, in addition to political considerations, might not have responded enthusiastically to the Land War. However, as can be seen from the example of many Home Rule MPs, being a landlord did not preclude one from supporting the Land League. Landlordism was by no means rare among individual clergymen and, as is evident from convents and schools administration of property for fundraising purposes, it was commonplace for the Church to act as landlord, even into the twentieth century. Indeed the archive of the archdiocese of Tuam contains a large and poorly-organised file of rent receipts from MacEvilly's tenure. Whatever the reason for the Church's landholdings, it had a vested interest in the perpetuation of the system. No single person illustrates this point better than John MacHale. Indeed, as Thomas MacHale was the archbishop's heir, his resistance to the movement can hardly be considered surprising either. Although he was one of the trustees of the Achill estate, there is no evidence that Ulick Bourke himself held land or profited personally from the system. However, his desire for order, a strong Church, and a Catholic elite meant that he was not opposed to it. What is surprising is that Bourke broke from the MacHales' consensus and played a pivotal role in the Claremorris meeting. However, as will be demonstrated below, while supportive of tenant right,

[80] Thomas MacHale MacEvilly, 25 April 1889 (TDA, MacEvilly papers, B2/4-i/3).

he did not initially support the idea of a peasant proprietary and only changed his position when compensation for landlords became a realistic prospect.

## The Claremorris Meeting

When the Claremorris meeting took place it was not without its drama and, while Bourke now appeared to cooperate with some of the 'strolling men', he also attempted to impose his own agenda. Five priests took to the platform, including Bourke's curate James Corbett who, as will be shown later, held more militant views than Bourke and got more involved in the grassroots organisation of the Land League. John Devoy, who was legally barred from entering the country, secretly visited Ireland and attended the meeting incognito, despite Davitt's repeated efforts to dissuade him from doing so. He was also present in the hotel where the organising committee met on the preceding evening. Devoy himself did not participate in the organising meeting, but claimed he overheard much of it from the next room, and that he received regular updates on proceedings. The substance of Devoy's report was that Ulick Bourke attempted to have resolutions tabled on Catholic education and the temporal power of the pope, but the others present did not accept these, seeking instead to build a movement that included Protestants. According to Devoy, Thomas MacHale had instructed Bourke through letters and telegrams to table these motions and 'Poor old Archbishop MacHale, then in his dotage, was being used by a group around him to stem the torrent'. Devoy stated that when Bourke threatened to withdraw from chairing the meeting if these resolutions were not accepted he was told that they would proceed without him. His bluff called, Bourke capitulated.[81]

[81] John Devoy, *Michael Davitt,* Carla King and W.J. Mc Cormack (eds) (Dublin, 2008), pp 144-5.

Despite the differences of opinion, much was made of the fact that priests were finally taking part in land meetings. In reporting on the Claremorris meeting and another held in Borrisleigh, Co. Tipperary on the same day, the *Freeman's Journal* stated: 'At both the grand old union which has done so much for Ireland was exhibited in all its ancient strength and vigour, for at both priests and people stood on the same platform to advocate the same just reforms'.[82] The *Connaught Telegraph* was more circumspect, stating: 'owing to the action of his Grace the archbishop and the Priests of this diocese with regards to the previous meetings at Irishtown, Westport & c., it was feared that some disturbance would take place'.[83] In his opening statement, Bourke proclaimed: 'some six months ago a meeting of the people would not have excited much attention, but the continuousness of these meetings and the effects already produced on society and the tone they are imparting to the minds of Irishmen have at length arrested the attention not only of persons in high positions but of the British Government'. Referring to the clergy's newfound role, Bourke stated: 'for the past six months the clergy have not, owing to some misunderstanding, been on the same platform as the people. Today, however, the priests and the people of Mayo are as one'.[84]

Bourke did not elaborate on the exact nature of the misunderstanding, but his presence on the platform did not necessarily mean the 'misunderstandings' were over. He said that when the priests and people joined together as one success would bless their efforts. However, he called for restraint and told the crowd to 'perform not a single act, utter not a word that could give an opportunity to your enemies and the enemies of your race to say that you are unworthy of the rights of freemen-

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82 *Freeman's Journal,* 14 July 1879.
83 *Connaught Telegraph,* 19 Jul. 1879.
84 *Freeman's Journal,* 14 July 1879; *Connaught Telegraph,* 19 July 1879.

unworthy of those land rights which tillers of the soil throughout Europe enjoy'.[85] He warned against 'senseless challenging' of the British government and said 'the explosive fury of a few untrained or unthinking men tend to injure very much a good cause'. Bourke called for the landlords to lower rents and relieve their tenants and for the tenants to be rooted in the soil. Both Michael Davitt and J.J. Louden used the meeting to call for a peasant proprietary and, while Bourke acknowledged this as a possible solution to the land question, he felt that granting perpetual leases was 'the easiest, the most reasonable, and the best for tenant and landlord, for after all, say what you will, there is a certain mutual attachment between the kind landlord and his tenantry'.[86]

These calls for restraint and sympathy for landlords were certainly among the least radical of proclamations made from platforms throughout the summer of 1879 and, in participating, Bourke attempted to act as a restraining influence. Canon Waldron proposed the first resolution of the meeting and he – citing a fall in prices – called for a reduction in rents, which Michael Davitt seconded before taking the floor. Davitt engaged with Bourke in as charming and mischievous a manner as that in which he had responded to MacHale's letter. He stated that while Canon Bourke had given excellent advice,

> he, though he went further in Irish politics than Canon Bourke, did not wish to add a word to that (applause). They had been told that inflammatory language had been used at previous meetings; but he asked the government to point to any outrages that had resulted from it. They had been called

[85] *Freeman's Journal,* 14 Jul. 1879.
[86] *Freeman's Journal,* 14 July 1879; *Connaught Telegraph,* 19 July 1879.

> "Communists" and "Fenians" because they asked the right to live in Ireland; but they may retaliate, and asked what right landlords have to the soil. [87]

Davitt further claimed that until this point the agitators had been too moderate in simply asking for a reduction of rents, which they could not pay.

Bourke's sympathy towards Irish landlords did not extend to the English. When J.J. Louden of Westport said the movement was, 'not without allies, for they had the English democracy at its back', Bourke felt compelled to use his position as chair to interject, saying:

> There are two propositions which have been uttered by Mr. Louden to which, as chairman, I must necessarily object. One was that we unite with the democracy of England. I hope we never shall. We are a religious people. We have never united with the English people, particularly with the democracy, and I hope we never shall (loud applause).

Bourke also disagreed with Louden's assertion that no landlord should be sent to the English parliament, pointing out that Parnell was a landlord, as was Joseph Biggar who, according to Bourke, was also a 'Whig'. Louden then backtracked somewhat and said that he had referred to Irish exiles living in England. Once assured of this, Bourke supported what Louden had said but stated, 'he was only afraid that word English democracy did not mean the Irish in England'. Speaking afterwards, James Daly referenced the archbishop's letter when 'he said they were no strollers. They could count back four or five generations to their forefathers in this country'.[88] At the close of the meeting, Fr Killeen proposed a vote of thanks to Canon Bourke, which

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87 Ibid.
88 *Freeman's Journal,* 14 July 1879.

Davitt seconded. Describing Bourke as eloquent and patriotic, he said, 'it would be like painting a lily or attempting to gild refined gold to say anything in praise of Father Bourke'.[89]

## The Aghamore and Williamstown Meetings

Even after Bourke had manoeuvred himself into a position of relative power in the Land League he continued to be viewed with distrust. On 27 October 1879, less than three weeks after the commission of investigation into the Knock apparition had made its inquiries, a monster meeting took place in Aghamore, the sister parish of Knock, nine miles from Claremorris. The clergy were well-represented, with five on the platform and Archdeacon Cavanagh chairing.[90] Tensions between the clergy and lay leaders of the movement were still apparent and when Canon McDermott, parish priest of Killouve, spoke in defence of 'good' landlords and accused shopkeepers of exploiting tenant farmers, saying, 'they have, by accumulating debts upon you, brought you to your present position', he found himself heckled. When Michael Davitt took the platform he

> did not mince matters about Landlordism. He did not believe any phase of Landlordism should be tolerated in Ireland (cheers). He was not there to pronounce a laudation of good landlords who might be giving reductions now, for they were only giving back the money they had robbed the people of (cheers)...When forty or fifty meetings throughout Ireland had issued a

89 *Connaught Telegraph,* 19 July 1879.
90 *Freeman's Journal* 28 Oct. 1879, *Nation* 1 Nov. 1879.

demand for a peasant proprietary they were not here in the Barony of Costelloe, to talk about fixity of tenure.[91]

McDermott interjected, claiming that he did not oppose peasant proprietorship, but the cost made it unrealistic if the landlords were to be compensated. He also stated that any man who pretended to be more patriotic than the priests was no friend of the country. After being prevailed upon to withdraw any insinuation upon Davitt's character, the priest assured those in attendance that he was not accusing him of any pretence. This seemed satisfactory to Davitt who avoided aggravating the situation and told the audience that he believed the use of the word 'pretends' was 'simply a misapplication of the term'. Bourke spoke next and proposed a resolution; he called upon the government to provide funds for public works in order to create employment and drain marginal land. Bourke stated: 'there was no man [that] loved Ireland more than he (cheers) but it was not about the hills that were far off they were speaking- they were speaking of what could be done on the present occasion'. In response to this a voice from the crowd shouted: 'if we had a few good Canons we would soon blow the landlords away' and this earned laughter and applause.[92]

By January 1880, when Bourke participated in a meeting at Williamstown, Co. Galway, his public pronouncements on the land question, and the movement generally, had shifted somewhat. Beyond the speeches, one other incident on the day caught the attention of the press. The platform was so overladen with people that the centre collapsed, just as the chairman commenced the meeting, and Bourke and about twenty others, including Michael Davit and J.J. Louden, fell ten feet to the

[91] *Freeman's Journal* 28 Oct. 1879.
[92] Ibid.

ground. Bourke suffered some cuts and bruises to his head while Davitt escaped with a crushed hat. The chairman, Rev. Loftus, PP, both a priest and a landlord, was fortunate enough to have his fall broken by a reporter and a poor law guardian and sustained no serious injuries. After fifteen minutes the meeting resumed on the other half of the platform and Mr J. Smith, acting as secretary for the meeting, showed hostility to moderate Home Rule MPs when he told the crowd he had a letter from Mitchell Henry, but it was not worthwhile to take up time reading it and so he tore it up. He also stated that John Philip Nolan had been invited but had not responded and this elicited groans from the crowd.[93]

When Bourke spoke he now wholeheartedly accepted the consensus that had developed on peasant proprietorship. He expressed his satisfaction at the meeting and reminded those assembled that the priests of Claremorris had been among the first to join the movement. He stated that 'the English nation and the English aristocracy could not understand the present demand of the Irish people' and that peasant proprietorship would have 'numerous good results' and boost productivity. However, he did not match his criticism of the English with any criticism of landlords as a class. Bourke had often, as shown in chapters one and two, spoken favourably of the enlightened elements of English rule and his anti-English sentiments at land meetings stood alongside a conciliatory attitude towards landlords. He stated that 'it was not fair to blame the landlords; if those who were now demanding a peasant proprietary were in the same position they would be just as bad.' He further stated that 'he knew a great many landlords who had a most sympathetic feeling'. These statements drew cries of disagreement from the crowd. Possibly a fear of class war encouraged the anti-English nature of Bourke's rhetoric

[93] *Freeman's Journal,* 19 January 1880.

as he attempted to portray the conflict as between Irish and English rather than landlord and tenant, however, he would once again appeal to the English government on the land question. Bourke's view of land reform was one that would not injure the landlords themselves and he claimed that many would sell willingly if they got 'twenty years purchase'. He outlined the laws that could bring this about, how funds could be obtained from the church surplus fund and commended the progress on land reform thus far. In explanation of the initial reaction of the clergy to the agitation, and their subsequent change of heart, he told the crowd that when the movement commenced the priests were under the impression that the efforts of the agitators 'would stop all advance', but they had been mistaken. They had since realised that 'the efforts of these men had been successful. They had found that those who were most active were really for the advancement of the cause of the people.'[94]

## Compromise and Cooperation

The arrival of priests onto platforms did not go unnoticed in the Vatican and on 4 December 1879 Tobias Kirby wrote from the Irish College to inform MacEvilly that complaints had been made to the Holy See about some priests and bishops who had used language 'calculated to excite the people unduly against their landlords.' It was also said that they had given support to a man believed to be a socialist, presumably Davitt. Kirby told the Vatican that while the occasional ecclesiastic may use an expression that could not be approved of, such instances were rare and the 'Irish Episcopacy & clergy as a body were always happily on the side of law and order'. He explained their actions on the land issue were influenced by the need 'to

[94] *Freeman's Journal* 19 January 1880.

keep the people always united with them; otherwise the consequences might be fatal to the people & to the religion itself.'[95] Kirby further advised the Holy See against taking any action on these matters. Kirby transmitted to the Vatican the pragmatic approach of the Irish clergy to the land agitation. Reservations about socialism and violence were assuaged by the need to keep people and Church united. Kirby's fear that disunity could prove fatal to 'the religion itself' highlights the severity of the situation and demonstrates that the clergy did not have the confidence to continue their opposition the movement.

While the clergy and tenant right leaders may have been suspicious of each other, the eventual involvement of clerics in the organisation brought mutual benefits. As the movement grew, for reasons of organisation and in order to expand, it became advantageous to allocate positions to clergymen and they in turn gained a stake in the organisation that a large number of their flock were part of. However, according to Samuel Clark, 'it is essential to recognise that they were primarily motivated by a fear that the struggle between landlords and tenants would create an irreparable gulf between themselves and their people'. Clark further states that the clergy formed a less vital part of the local leadership of the league than they had in previous movements.[96]

A meeting in Balla, Co. Mayo, on the Feast of the Assumption, 15 August 1879, highlighted the complexities of attitudes towards agitation, religion and the clergy. Many used the occasion to combine the journey for the land meeting with a trip to a local shrine and at the mass prior to the meeting, the crowd was so large that two thirds of the congregation had to remain in the churchyard. This devotion,

[95] Kirby to MacEvilly, 4 December 1879 (TDA, MacHale papers, B1/1-i/10).
[96] Clark, *Social Origins,* pp 286 and 290.

expressed in a trip to a shrine and attendance at mass, embodied both pre and post-devotional revolution practice. This does not mean that attitudes to the clergy were clear cut. A resolution at the meeting expressed gratitude for recent support from the clergy, in particular the clergy of Wexford. Matt Harris seconded the motion but stated:

> Of all the acquisitions to the ranks the most important were the Catholic clergy. No doubt, the priests and the people were firmly united as far as religious matters went, but on political matters the case was different. At several elections lately the priests had been on one side and the people on the other. In order to come to an understanding it was necessary the case should be met boldly. The Irish people had done more for their religion than any people in the world, but it did not follow that they were to allow a minority of anti-National churchmen to dictate to them in politics.

A voice from the crowd interjected to state 'we will cut off their supplies', a possible reference to withholding payment to clergymen who refused to cooperate. Harris went on to remind the clergy that this was the nineteenth century and 'the Irish people were an educated, intelligent and liberty-loving people who were determined to maintain their rights in opposition to any power, lay or clerical'. He stated that the people could not support clergymen who gave support to government 'placehunters' or prosecutors and that 'when the priests were in adversity the people stood by them without a falter.' He claimed that the majority of the clergy had sympathy with the people and that, if a small minority of authority figures shared this, millions of evictions could have been prevented. According to Harris, some of the clergy were

infected with the Catholic conservatism of the continent and 'the people did not want conservatism in any form for it was only another name for oppression and slavery.'[97]

Bourke became one of fourteen priests on the committee of the Land League when it was formed in October of 1879. In responding to Parnell's invitation Bourke claimed that the doctrine of peasant proprietorship was first proclaimed at the Claremorris meeting, although in actuality it had been called for at Irishtown, and Parnell had articulated this demand earlier that week at Kilnalleck. At the Claremorris meeting Bourke had called for perpetual leases as the best solution to the land question, as he felt there existed a mutual attachment between the tenant and the kind landlord. In writing to Parnell Bourke claimed that, while he had long supported peasant proprietorship, in drawing up the resolutions for Claremorris, he had been loath to be the first to publicly demand it. However, implying that the meeting's organisers had disagreed among themselves, he admitted that he was asked if he wanted to be less zealous than an Englishman, John Stuart Mill, in advocating the happiness of Irishmen. The precedents Bourke gave for a peasant proprietorship were threefold. He spoke of European nations, such as Belgium, where it existed and claimed that it was the system closest to that practiced in ancient Ireland when the land was held in common. He also gave biblical precedents, claiming that it would bring to the Irish people the same home comforts as enjoyed by the children of Judah and Israel. In essence then, this was the holy trinity for many of Bourke's views: an ancient Irish, a biblical, and a contemporary European precedent. Bourke claimed that as his views and Parnell's were in accord he would be happy to join the committee, but was unable to attend the inaugural meeting.[98]

[97] *Flag of Ireland* 23 August 1879 (press clipping in TCD, Davitt papers, 9356/641).
[98] Ulick Bourke to Charles Stewart Parnell, 18 October 1879 (TCD, Davitt Papers, 9369/845).

The more involved the clergy became in the movement the more moderate the demands and proclamations became and the less of a role the Fenians played. As the Land League grew into a national movement initiative was wrested away from local organisers, lay and clerical, and centralised in the leadership of the Land League, but from August 1879, when the Mayo Land League was formed, its founders made conscious efforts to involve the clergy.

When called before the Special Commission on Parnellism and Crime in 1890 John MacEvilly spoke of the role of the League and the clergy in preventing acts of violence and acting as a restraining influence. While admitting that violence had occurred he emphasised that the Land League did not condone it. He argued:

> Were it not that the clergy, who had the chief hand in conducting the Leagues, went hand-in-hand with the leaders of the League in restraining the people, who were driven to madness, owing to the gross and intolerable injustice of which they were, in many ways, the victims, I am convinced a different state of things would exist at this moment.

He claimed that the League had given people a legitimate channel to air their grievances and make them known to legislators. MacEvilly said he believed it was the responsibility of legislators to heed these grievances and that Parnell and his party had prevented crime through their actions. He highlighted the mistreatment of tenants by landlords in order to show their grievances were legitimate. He also pointed to the failings of the land courts in offering redress and claimed that before the League 'people were kept in a condition of the most humiliating slavery.' While he highlighted abuses by landlords, he said, 'it cannot, however, be denied, and it is

cheerfully admitted, that there are not a few exceptions- landlords benevolent and kind to their people, and such landlords are loved and respected.'[99]

## *A Plea for the Evicted Tenants of Mayo*

Despite the fact that Bourke did not remain very active throughout the course of the Land War, he had one further involvement with the issue of tenant right. In January 1883 he published a pamphlet, *A Plea for the Evicted Tenants of Mayo*. The Land War had theoretically ended with the Kilmainham treaty of the previous May but, in the Mace district of Claremorris parish, animosity abounded. The ramifications of evictions and agrarian violence ensured a cleavage in the Catholic community and class divisions undermined religious unity. Bourke's tract, dated 4 December 1882, took the form of an open letter to Prime Minister William Gladstone, to whom he had previously gifted a copy of the *Aryan Origins,* and exhorted the government to act to ameliorate suffering. He told Gladstone:

> Sir, proceedings such as those have tended to make the British Government odious to the people of Ireland. The boasted constitution of England is a palladium to English-born subjects, but Irishmen can see its beauties and its blessings, like one viewing the sun in an eclipse, or in a fog —only through the dark medium of the oppression that surrounds them.[100]

Admitting that unfair landlords could be native as well as alien, Bourke credited Gladstone with being 'anxious to remedy the evils and the woes that surround the lot

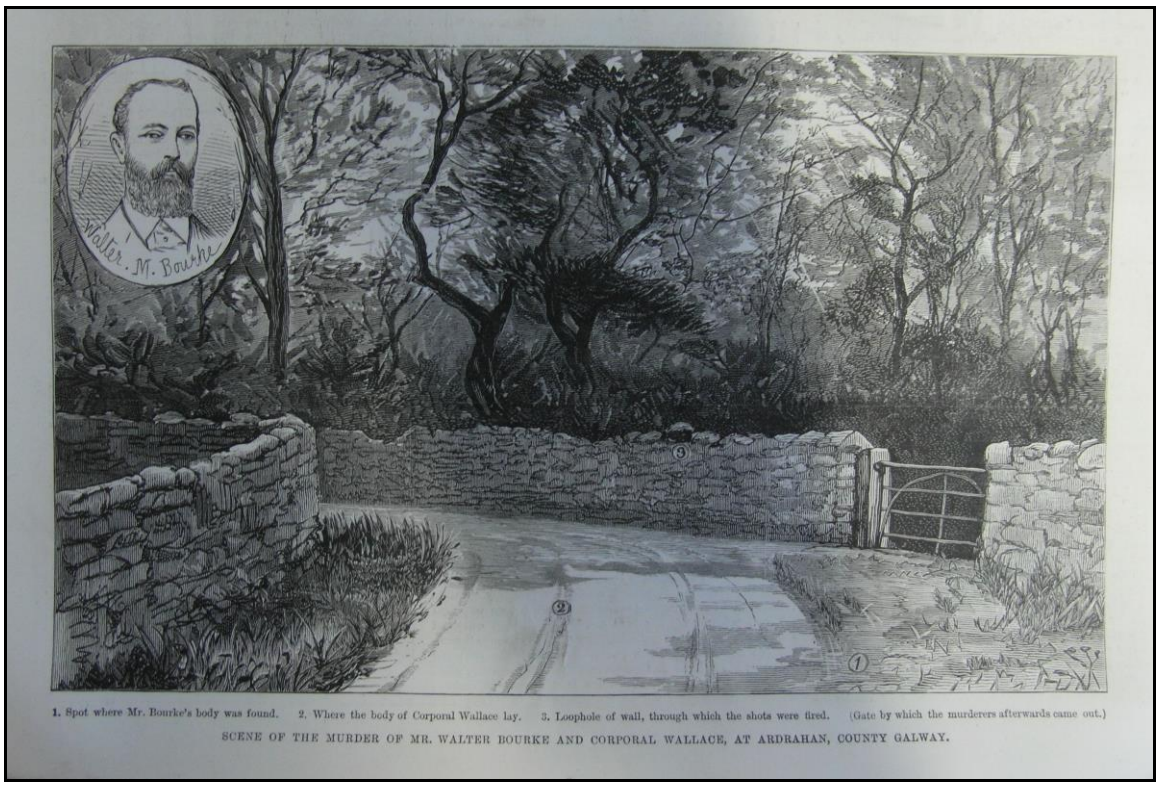
[99] Material relating to John MacEvilly's testimony to special commission on Parnellism and crime (TDA, MacEvilly papers, B2/8-ii/3).
[100] Ulick Bourke, *A Plea for the Evicted Tenants of Mayo* (Dublin, 1883) p. 16.

of the Irish peasant farmer.'[101] He contrasted Gladstone to the 'exterminating landlord' and said, 'the peasants of Ireland still cling to the idea that every Government ought to be paternal in regard to its subjects.'[102] Stating that MacEvilly had 'warmly urged' him to write this pamphlet, Bourke outlined a situation where fifty families, nearly 300 people, had been evicted in his parish. Bourke's plea centred not just on the eviction, but also on attempts to use the Coercion Act to levy a fine or 'eiric' on the people of the Barony of Clanmorris as a form of collective punishment for the murder of their landlord, Walter Bourke (no relation to Ulick Bourke), a barrister and a magistrate, as well as a Catholic. Canon Bourke went to great lengths to prove that the land was poor and the rents excessive. According to him, this, combined with the fact that the traditional seasonal work normally found in England had become increasingly scarce, had led to an inability to pay rent.[103] Bourke further denied that the tenants were lazy or dangerous, or that they withheld rent as a form of protest.

According to Ulick Bourke, he, Canon Geoffrey Bourke, cousin of the deceased, Archdeacon Cavanagh of Knock and Canon Peter Geraghty of Beckan, each of whom was 'a tried friend' of Walter Bourke, approached him in June 1881 and attempted to get him to reach agreement with his tenants. They spent a day reasoning with him but he would not yield.[104] It should be noted here that Geoffrey Bourke was the landlord priest whose actions Michael Davitt claimed had led to the Irishtown meeting. James Daly disputed this fact and, while Geoffrey Bourke was from a land-owning family, it is uncertain if he was in charge of the estate or

[101] Ibid., pp 16-7.
[102] Ibid., p. 19.
[103] Ibid., 8.
[104] Ibid., p. 12.

responsible for the evictions.[105] Ulick Bourke said of this visit: 'when Mr. Bourke, at last, after repeated counselling rejected my views, I was no longer bound to tender advice unsolicited.'[106]




**The scene of the murders of Walter Bourke and Corporal Wallace as depicted in the *London Illustrated News,* 17 June 1882.**

For the rest of the pamphlet he appealed to Gladstone to address the situation and attempted to allay fears about the allegedly violent nature of the peasantry, outlining the material conditions that had led to the situation. This case highlighted the problematic nature of considering religion a unifying cultural or social force in the face of diametrically opposed social and economic interests. Walter Bourke resided on the family estate at Curraleigh, Co. Mayo but had been assassinated near his other property at Rahassane, Co. Galway on 8 June 1882, in what was accepted to be an act of agrarian violence. The murder was believed to be

[105] Moody, *Davitt,* p. 292.
[106] Bourke*, Plea for the Evicted* Tenants, p. 12.

agrarian in nature not simply because Walter Bourke was a landlord, but because he was a deeply unpopular landlord. He not only carried out evictions but served writs himself and was regularly involved in litigation against his tenants. His murder, barely a month after the Phoenix Park murders, caused considerable alarm among the establishment and generated significant press coverage. It also, however, highlighted many ambiguities in the engagement of Catholic Clergy with land agitation.

The friendship between Ulick Bourke and Walter Bourke extended back over two decades. Walter was a barrister and had been based in India for some years. Even while there he donated £10 to the fund for Canon Bourke's ambitious expansion of St Jarlath's College. With the donation, he sent a letter stating, 'Such institutions (as St Jarlath's College) command the admiration of every Irish Catholic for what they have done, are doing and, with the blessing of God, will continue to do.'[107] In 1872 Walter Bourke sent ten pounds to the defence fund for Captain Nolan. Once again there was an accompanying letter, reproduced in the *Freeman's Journal*, which condemned the court's judgement of electoral interference against Nolan and the clergy, and stated: 'soon will the wantonly aspersed characters of holy prelates and pious priests and the honour of an independent constituency be vindicated.'[108] In 1880 Walter Bourke put himself forward for election with, in the finest of political traditions, extremely vague policies. The *Irish Times* reported that 'his principles are those advocated by Mr Parnell, and, if elected, will legislate for the benefit of the country, being in favour of every measure which may tend to ameliorate Ireland.' The fact that Bourke would closely associate himself with Parnellite politics is

[107] *Freeman's Journal,* 4 September 1870.
[108] Ibid., 2 September 1872.

unusual, considering that at this stage Parnell had become synonymous with land reform. As already stated, James Daly suspected Ulick Bourke of having a hand in Walter Bourke's candidacy and the *Times* gave further credence to this by saying, 'the clergy have not selected a candidate here up to the present, but Mr Bourke it is rumoured, was chosen by the clergy of Claremorris.'[109]

The final year of Walter Bourke's life was marked by open hostility between him and his tenants. This was evidenced in the extraordinary scenes that took place in Barnacarroll Church on two consecutive Sundays, 22 and 29 May 1881. The church stood on land belonging to the Bourke family, but unknown persons smashed the family pew at some point in 1881, apparently in reaction to Walter Bourke's curt manner of dispersing other members of the congregation from it.[110] Bourke had personally served writs against a number of tenants and had taken to going about armed with a pistol and a double-barrelled Winchester rifle. Fr Corbett, curate of Claremorris and secretary of the local Land League branch, wrote to the *Freeman's Journal* detailing how on 22 May as Walter Bourke departed from mass it became apparent to the other members of the congregation that he had a rifle concealed under his cloak. Having arrived early this had not been noticed, but 'as soon as he got outside the congregation pursued him, and commenced to hoot and shout after him.' Perhaps the tenants felt emboldened by the fact that the 1881 Land Act was under discussion at the time and Fr Corbett said, 'if Mr. Bourke attempts again to enter the church in which I am officiating, as he did to-day, I shall take means to prevent him, and let the government see the consequences.' Corbett further drew attention to the fact that Bourke was a magistrate and asked the Lord

[109] *Irish Times,* 08 May 1880.
[110] *Freeman's Journal,* 16 December 1882.

Lieutenant if the Irish executive was going to allow landlords to bully the people this way ‘even in the House of God!’[111]

Given Corbett's assertion that he would not tolerate Walter Bourke armed in the church, it is probably no coincidence that on the following Sunday Ulick Bourke travelled out to Barnacarroll from Claremorris to celebrate mass. It seems that, anticipating some sort of disturbance, the *Freeman's Journal* sent a correspondent along and a report appeared in the newspaper the next day. This time the congregation knew of Walter Bourke's firearms and a delegation approached Canon Bourke when he arrived at the chapel. They demanded that Walter Bourke leave his guns outside and when he refused 'every effort was made by Canon Bourke to pacify the congregation and induce them to allow the mass to be celebrated, but to no purpose.' The congregation then insisted that Walter Bourke should exit from the church. After a lengthy discussion between Walter and Ulick, Walter was convinced to retire to the sacristy with his gun, family members, and servants. This, however, was not a satisfactory solution to the congregation and in what must have been a humiliating outcome for both Bourkes, 'every single man, woman, and child left the chapel carrying with them in the rush both the Canon himself and his clerk.'[112] Eventually, Walter Bourke and his family left by a side door and mass began. A large force of police gathered in the chapel yard but did not interfere in proceedings. This incident must have illustrated to Canon Bourke in very clear terms the cleavage between the different social and economic classes in his congregation and it was only after this that he and the other clergymen called on Walter Bourke to ask him to reach a compromise with his tenants. There was, however, no respite to Walter

[111] Ibid., 24 May 1881.
[112] Ibid., 30 May 1881.

Bourke's determination and the next year saw him involved in a number of disputes with his tenants, many petty in nature. Court cases involving Bourke and his tenants became a regular feature in the press as he prosecuted them for such acts as burning land without permission and allowing Land League huts to be erected on their farms.[113] In August 1881 the Land League activist P.J. Gordon was brought to trial for inciting people to murder Bourke and Hubert Davis, a landlord in Ballyhaunis.[114]

Considering the antagonistic nature of many of Walter Bourke's actions it should not come as any great surprise that he fell victim to some form of agrarian violence. However, the amount of media attention the case generated illustrated that it was considered remarkable for a number of reasons. First, the Land War was technically over, the Kilmainham treaty had been signed the month before and the Land League had been suppressed. Second, despite a high number of agrarian outrages in the period, the murder of a landlord was an extremely rare event and, following on from the Phoenix Park murders the previous month, the country had been in a state of relative tranquillity with many developing an abhorrence of violent methods. The Phoenix Park murders no doubt stimulated interest in the case, with some early reports even inaccurately reporting that Walter Bourke was a relative of the late undersecretary, Thomas Burke, who, along with the newly appointed Chief Secretary Lord Cavendish, had been slain by a group calling themselves the Invincibles. Coincidentally, Thomas Burke, as noted in the previous chapter, was an Irish Catholic from Tuam and had also subscribed to Bourke's building fund for St Jarlath's. So exceptional was the case that on 27 June the *Irish Times* reported: 'Her Majesty has been pleased through Sir Henry Ponsonby to write inquiring as to the

[113] *Irish Times,* 01 July 1881 and 09 July 1881. *Freeman's Journal*, 03 December 1881.
[114] *Nation*, 23 August 1881.

state and expressing condolence with the mother of the late Mr Walter M. Bourke.'[115]

Despite his initial resistance to accepting a military escort Walter Bourke had, by the time of his murder, realised its necessity. However, rather than travelling with the standard allotment of two soldiers he travelled with only one, Lance Corporal Wallace, who also lost his life in the attack. Ironically, Wallace was a working-class Protestant who died protecting a Catholic landlord. Following the murder, the media emphasised the level of conflict between Bourke and his tenants and, according to the *Freeman's Journal*, 'during the whole land agitation they and he have been at little short of an open war.'[116] On the morning of the murder Bourke and Wallace travelled to Gort to attend the land court, where some of Bourke's tenants had applied to have judicial rents fixed. On their arrival, Bourke discovered that the court was not sitting as it was a Catholic holiday, a fact of which he, as a Catholic and a magistrate, should have been aware. On their way back to Rahassane, near a place called Castle Taylor, a group of six men ambushed and shot Bourke and Wallace, killing both. A witness, Mr Shaw Taylor of Castle Taylor, reported seeing the killers make their getaway over the fields but could not identify them and no-one was ever apprehended for the crime. Bourke's remains were taken by hearse and train to Claremorris and from there to Barnacarroll where he was interred in the family vault. Reports of the funeral detailed that it was well attended with a large number of tenants present, yet, apart from Geoffrey Bourke and Ulick Bourke, there were no priests.

[115] *Irish Times,* 27 June 1882.
[116] *Freeman's Journal*, 09 June 1882.

Walter's brother Isidore inherited his property. He had been a high ranking British Army surgeon during the Afghan war. If anything, Isidore Bourke followed an even more antagonistic course against the tenants than his brother and engaged in acts such as seizing cattle from those who could not pay rent. A hearing for compensation of £20,000 opened at the end of November 1882 and the first witness called was Isidore. He stated that he intended to show the people that 'they had not gained by the murder and he was not to be intimidated.' Although Isidore said he was not intimidated, he travelled everywhere with three armed policemen. When asked at the compensation hearing if the clergy had denounced the murder, he said, 'far from denouncing them they have encouraged them in my opinion.' Fr Quinn of Oranmore and Fr Commins PP of Claregalway disputed this.[117] Later in the proceedings Isidore stated that none of the Catholic clergy expressed condolences to him or his mother after the murder, a point that Ulick Bourke stood up to dispute. Isidore Bourke's legal team attempted to levy compensation from the district around Curraleigh as well as Rahassane. When it was pointed out that the murder had occurred in Galway and not Mayo, Fr Corbett's letter to the *Freeman* regarding Bourke coming to mass armed was produced as evidence that Corbett had been involved in instigating the murder. The prosecution referred to letters by Corbett in other publications and also to notes from a local Land League meeting where Fr Corbett had put forward a motion denouncing Bourke, which P.J. Gordon had seconded. In giving evidence Major Trall, Resident Magistrate at Claremorris, stated that he had attended nine evictions of Bourke's tenants and had recommended protection for him.[118] He further stated that some people in the district had expressed

[117] *Irish Times*, 29 November 1882.
[118] *Freeman's Journal,* 14 December 1882.

their appreciation at the murder of Bourke by keeping businesses open during his funeral procession. The assertion, however, is not borne out by the reports of either the *Irish Times* or *Freeman's Journal.*

Once again taking to the stand Isidore Bourke gave statement on ill feeling toward his brother and said that before the formation of Claremorris branch of the Land League the family had been held in high esteem in the area and counted priests and bishops as close friends. He admitted that on the Sunday after the murder Corbett had requested prayers for the repose of the soul of Walter Bourke, giving lie to many of his earlier claims. Ulick Bourke was called as a witness for the ratepayers and stated that he had known the deceased for twenty-two or twenty-three years and felt his death as he would that of a brother. He refuted Isidore Bourke's assertion that sympathy from the priests had not been forthcoming. Canon Bourke stated that rules laid down by the bishop stipulated that priests could not attend a funeral outside their own parish unless invited. He received his invitation directly from Geoffrey Bourke, but no other priest was invited. He claimed that there was no conspiracy or sympathy with conspiracy in the parish and that the tenants loved Walter Bourke as a 'father loves a bad son'. Ulick Bourke said that he had no involvement with the local branch of the Land League or knowledge of its workings. He knew that Corbett had been its secretary and that the people supported it, 'and they were right.'[119]

Ulick Bourke gave an interesting insight into Walter Bourke's attitude to his tenants and how his time in India might have affected this. 'He told me he was not afraid of his tenantry,' and having been in India fifteen or sixteen years, 'he was not afraid of sixty or seventy Hindoos (sic), and he regarded his tenantry as

[119] Ibid.,16 December 1882

Hindoos.'[120] The contempt with which Walter Bourke treated his tenants certainly indicates that he viewed them as a race apart and if he developed this attitude as a result of his time in India it is possible that his brother Isidore developed a similar attitude from his time in Afghanistan. It would certainly seem that the religion the Bourkes shared with their tenants did not make them any closer to them or better landlords. In relation to whether he himself had denounced outrages, Ulick Bourke replied: 'I did not denounce outrages specifically, but I denounced all evil, and if an outrage was a sin I denounced it as such. But cutting hair off an ass's tail was not an outrage which should be denounced as a sin (laughter).'[121] The situation surrounding the death of Walter Bourke demonstrates that after three years of agrarian agitation Bourke sought to appear supportive of tenants. However, he counted landlords, even bad landlords, as friends. It also shows that while accepting a position on the national committee of the Land League, he had no involvement at a local level and opposed disobedience, including the withholding of rent. Furthermore, despite the anti-English rhetoric Bourke employed on platforms, when his own parishioners found themselves involved in conflict with their landlord he not only dissuaded them from taking any effective action, but appealed first to the landlord and then to the Prime Minister to act paternally.

## Conclusion

When one considers the clergy's attitude to radical politics generally and their involvement in the system of landlordism, their initial reluctance to support the Land War is not all that surprising. Fenians played a prominent role in organising the

[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid.

agitation, it dealt with issues of class and property, and commenced without the approval of the clergy. To the clergy the movement appeared infused with socialist and secular ideology. The protest against Cavanagh demonstrated that the opposition of the clergy would not prevent the people from engaging in land agitation. Bourke took the initiative in healing this rift, but on taking the platform at Claremorris he was quick to oppose ideas of cooperating with English 'democracy'. His attempts, if Devoy is to be believed, to make Catholicism part of the ideology of the movement show that he sought to keep the objectives of the Church to the fore in any popular movement. MacHale's outright opposition to the movement was in contrast to the circumspect attitude of MacEvilly, who had less of a reputation as a nationalist cleric. MacHale's opposition could stem from any number of sources. He may, as many at the time believed, have fallen under the influence of Thomas MacHale, but his ability to administer confirmation and attend the unveiling of the Gray statue in Dublin show that he was not incapacitated. That he condemned the agitation at the Dublin event shows he had some level of lucidity. Likewise, he may still have been smarting from the manner in which he was treated at the 1874 election, but his belief that the people were best led by the clergy and Catholic landlords was in no way unusual. His belief in the system of landlordism is best exemplified by his own role in that system and the size of his estates on his death demonstrates he personally benefited from it.

However, it is important to remember that most proposals for peasant proprietorship called for compensation for landlords. The landlords who supported this included Charles Stewart Parnell, John Philip Nolan, and Joseph Biggar. Paul Bew has ventured that one of Parnell's motivations to support land reform was to protect the position of the Anglo-Irish elite by removing the greatest obstacle to

harmony between them and the majority of the population.[122] Bourke's views on the movement coincided more closely with MacEvilly's than MacHale's and he acted as a voice of restraint. The clergy, despite claiming to support tenant right, were not averse to supporting landlords for election on a nationalist ticket. This was not unusual though and many nationalist MPs were landlords. Support for tenant right did not always equate to opposition to landlordism and, as seen with the support demonstrated for Captain Nolan, even a landlord who had transgressed could win the support of nationalists, clergy included, if they showed their commitment to tenant right. The Land War marked a departure from traditional agrarian campaigns as it not only demanded tenant right but called for the abolition of landlordism. While peasant proprietorship may not have been the initial goal of Irish nationalist leaders, the tenants themselves demanded it and eventually it became the end goal of the movement. Like the Land League itself, the clergy, Bourke included, came to support peasant proprietorship because opposing such a popular goal would have undermined their own authority. Bourke realised this early on and showed initiative in becoming involved with the League.

Ulick Bourke demonstrates that professions of romantic nationalism did not necessarily lend themselves to political radicalism. While unwilling to accept the support of or be associated with 'English democracy', he showed himself more than willing to accept that landlords had a place in Irish society. Furthermore, despite his perceived relationship to Fenianism and his willingness to exploit it in order to promote St Jarlath's, his own actions show him to have been conservative and inclined towards caution. When the alleged apparition took place at Knock on 21 August Bourke was not only well positioned to exploit it but, in light of the conflict

[122] Paul Bew, *Enigma: A New Life of Charles Stewart Parnell* (Dublin, 2011).

between priests and people, had significant motives to do so. The very public denunciations of and protests against Bourke and Cavanagh had undermined their authority in the eyes of a massively popular social movement. That the apparition presented an opportunity for the clergy to attempt to regain their authority cannot have escaped Bourke. Without doubt the social, economic and political backdrop of the Land War influenced the response of the people to the accounts of the apparition, but Ulick Bourke would yet have a chance to shape the narrative that the people would receive.

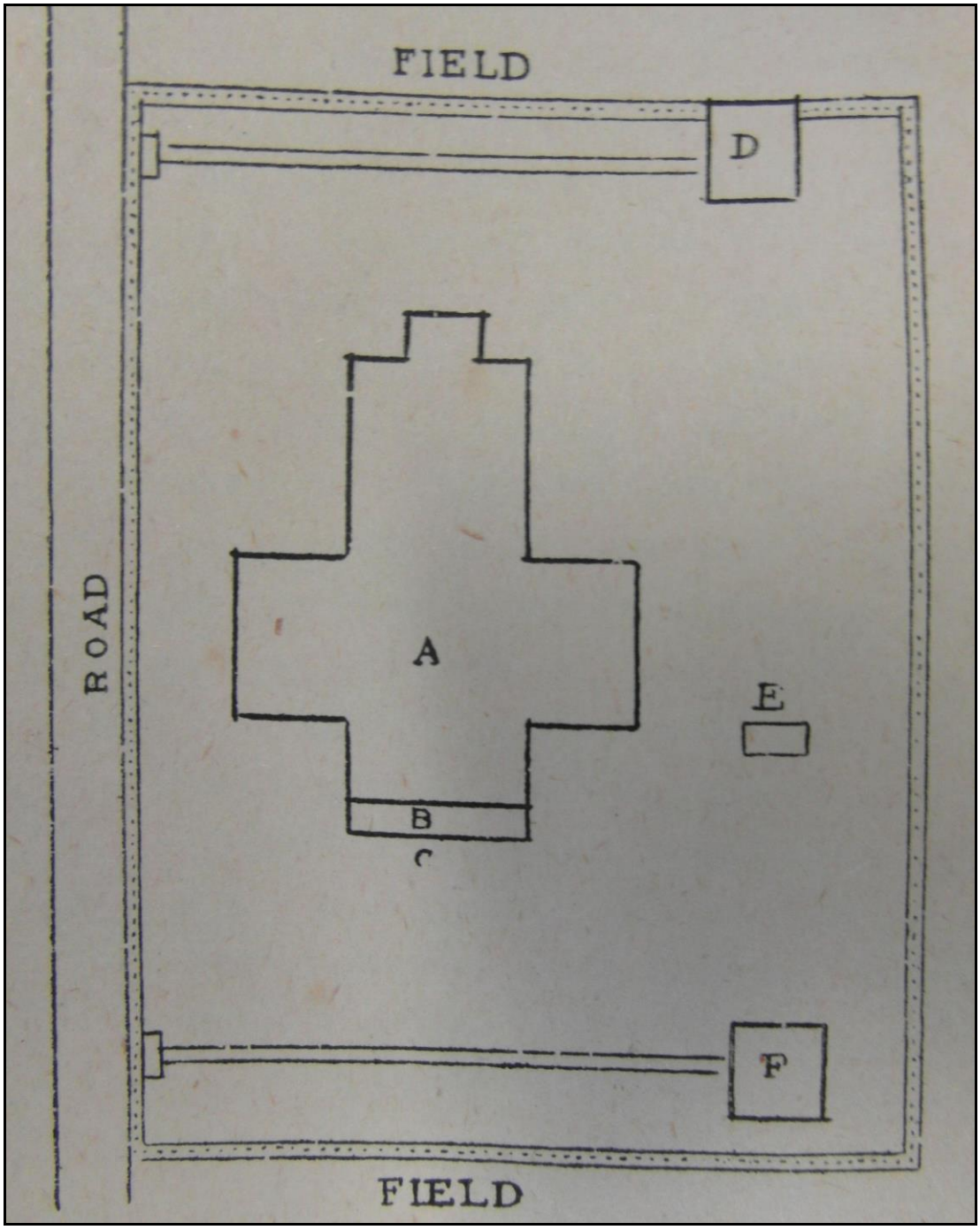
# Chapter 5: ‘Let Men of Learning Account for It as They Like’ – The Story of Knock Takes Shape

The village of Knock was, in 1879, an unremarkable place. It contained a small church, which had been built in 1828, on the grounds of which were two one room national schools, one for boys and one for girls. There was no concentration of buildings to constitute what might normally be considered a village, but instead a scattering of small rural dwellings, primarily occupied by small-holders who were tenants of the Dillon estate. Many of those living in the vicinity of the chapel were members of the extended Beirne family, which is an alternate spelling of Byrne. Dominick Beirne, a man in his early twenties, lived close to the chapel with his mother and two sisters and served as sacristan to Fr Cavanagh. When he was unable to attend to his duties one of his sisters, Mary or Maggie, substituted for him. On the evening of 21 August Dominick did not lock the church and both of his sisters at separate times, seemingly not having consulted, travelled the short distance to the chapel to lock it. Maggie went sometime around 7:30pm and returned home without remarking on having seen anything unusual. Sometime after this the priest’s housekeeper, Mary McLoughlin, made a social visit to the Beirnes, passing by the church on her way, and she too did not mention seeing anything out of the ordinary, although both would later claim they had seen some form of apparition at this point. McLoughlin remained a short time and when she departed Mary Beirne walked with her as far as the church, unaware that her sister had already locked it. When they came to the church at around 8 o’clock Mary Beirne pointed out to Mary McLoughlin what came to be taken as an apparition of the Blessed Virgin, St Joseph, and St John the Evangelist, suspended between one and two feet above the ground, at

the south gable of Knock chapel. Beside them was said to have been an altar with a lamb and a cross on top of it. Family and neighbours were alerted and in all fifteen people claimed to have seen an apparition of some kind with some claiming to have remained only a few minutes and others claiming to have seen it for up to an hour and a half.

No academic examined the Knock apparition until 1986, when Michael P. Carroll included it as one of a number of apparitions he investigated in *The Cult of the Virgin Mary: Psychological Origins.*[1] While Carroll highlighted the significance of the Land War as a backdrop to the Knock apparition, it was James S. Donnelly's 1993 article 'The Marian Shrine at Knock: The First decade' which was responsible for alerting historians to the fact that the wide range of material which had been published on the Land War had missed the significance of the apparition. This was a point engaged with by Paul Bew who remarked that, in commemorating and commenting on the centenary of the Land War, he and other historians had failed to grasp the significance of the simultaneous celebration of the centenary of the Knock apparition.[2] Efforts to connect the Land War and Knock apparition informed John J. White's 1999 Ph.D. thesis and, while he had success identifying sources and highlighting events of significance, he struggles to coalesce these into a cohesive argument. To date the only monograph published on Knock by an academic is Eugene Hynes' 2008, *Knock: The Virgin's Apparition in Nineteenth Century Ireland.* As a sociologist, Hynes' methodology leads him to examine the social power of the clergy and the significance of folklore and folk religious practice and,

[1] Michael P. Carroll, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary: Psychological Origins* (Princeton, 1986).
[2] Paul Bew, "A Vision to the Dispossessed? Popular Piety and Revolutionary Politics in the Irish Land war, 1879-82" *Historical Studies XX: Religion and Rebellion,* in Judith Devlin and Ronan Fanning (eds) (Dublin, 1997) pp 137-51; Bew, *Land and the National Question in Ireland, 1858-82,* (Dublin, 1978).




**A plan of the apparition site from the *Apparitions at Knock.* A represents the chapel; B is the sacristy; C is the apparition site; D is the boys' school; E is the grave of the father of a former parish priest; and F is the girls' school. If one continued walking in an easterly direction along the southern boundary wall it was only a short distance to the Beirne household.**

despite the fact his book is based on exhaustive research, his conclusions can be opaque or even contradictory. While all of these works have considerable merit, and have shed light on the conditions that led to the apparition and the subsequent development of pilgrimage, they are united in their failure to examine the significance of Ulick Bourke.

Bourke not only recorded and influenced the witness testimony through his participation in the commission of investigation, he played a key role in transmitting it to the public. In March 1880, over six months after its occurrence, the *Tuam News* published a pamphlet titled *The Apparitions at Knock* detailing the alleged apparition. This publication is significant for a number of reasons. It reproduced what it described as the 'official depositions of the eye-witnesses' and this version of the event has remained the definitive account. The testimony came from the commission of investigation into the apparition, which consisted of Bourke, Cavanagh and Canon James Waldron of Ballyhaunis.[3] As the commission left little in the way of evidence of its investigation the *Apparitions at Knock* became the principal account. It was the first of numerous devotional works on Knock and provided the template for later accounts.

Most accounts state the commission of investigation sat for only one day, 8 October 1879, and conducted its business in the sacristy of Knock chapel. Hynes highlights contradictory reports that the commission contained more than three priests, or met over a longer period of time, but these fall into the realm of conjecture. There is a report which states the commission was assisted in its

[3] MacPhilpin, *Apparitions at Knock*, title page and p. 29.

investigation by other priests including Fr James Corbett of Claremorris, and five other local clergy. Hynes also states that a later commission investigated alleged cures, but either did not complete its task or found no proof of cures.[4] This confusion is symptomatic of the lack of documentary evidence on the commission and the slipshod manner in which it conducted its work. According to the special correspondent of the *Nation*, Thomas Sexton, 'Archdeacon Cavanagh then reported to the archbishop that his decree had been duly executed. With his Grace now rests the question whether he shall make a report to the Holy See.'[5] If a report was submitted to the archdiocese, it was never acted upon but the testimony did become the basis for accounts of the apparition.

While John MacPhilpin is often credited as the author the *Apparitions at Knock*, its title page in fact states the work has been edited and prepared by him. It can therefore be stated with certainty that he is not the author, or at least not the sole author. Where he is credited in this thesis, it is as editor of the work. Compelling evidence suggests Ulick Bourke wrote much if not all of the pamphlet and the language and themes contained in the text are similar to those that appear in his other works, as is the narrative voice. This narrative voice is also similar to that used in the witness testimony itself. The *Apparitions at Knock* utilises the triumvirate of precedent seen in much of Bourke's work namely; the establishment of European, ancient Irish and biblical precedents. Biblical precedents include comparing Knock to Hebron, due to its surrounding hills, describing it as an 'unpretending Nazareth' and speaking of other miracles witnessed by figures such as Moses and Daniel. The European precedents include apparitions at Lourdes, La Salette and Marpingen,

[4] Hynes, *Knock*, pp 176-8.
[5] Thomas Sexton, *The Illustrated Record of the Apparitions at Knock* (Dublin, 1880), p. 21.

while the Irish precedent is the people's long-held Catholicism. The apparition therefore rewarded their faith, just as Bourke believed God had used the penal period to test it. For Bourke, therefore, the apparition served as a reward for the strength Irish Catholics had shown in persevering the penal period. As stated in the previous chapter, there was an expectation that the Blessed Virgin would appear in Ireland and the pamphlet quoted a 'respected and intelligent correspondent' as saying: 'It was only congruous that our Blessed Lady should manifest her presence in some remarkable way to her devout and devoted children in Ireland.' The pamphlet worked to portray Knock as a 'Second Lourdes' and after detailing miracles in Germany, France, Poland, and Germany, said: 'Why, then, should not faithful Ireland, so devoted to the saviour of mankind and to his holy mother, be similarly savoured by her heavenly presence?'[6] This implication was more than a spiritual one. Lourdes had gained worldwide fame and drew large numbers of pilgrims, bringing enormous benefit to the area. This text is not a passive recording of the events, rather it is a narrative that has been actively shaped by Bourke. The manner in which the commission questioned and recorded the testimony of the witnesses and the way it was edited and elaborated upon for publication created the 'official' account as published by MacPhilpin. The *Apparitions at Knock* not only published this testimony but argued for its credibility and for the veracity of the apparition. This is consistent with Bourke's method of taking something organic and attempting to influence its form in a manner that suited his own prejudices and ideologies.

While there were claims of subsequent apparitions at Knock, and the *Apparitions at Knock* gives some credence to these, the initial apparition was viewed as considerably more credible and the author said: 'the proofs regarding it rest on the

[6] MacPhilpin, *Apparitions at Knock,* pp 3-7.

evidence of the witnesses who assert, and even swear, that they beheld it. They are at least fifteen in number.'[7] Even devotees of Knock attach no real significance to subsequent apparitions and one writer, Monsignor Michael Walsh, described them as 'spiritual mimicry' perpetrated either by people or the devil.[8] The initial apparition has been viewed as most credible and the testimony as recorded and disseminated by Bourke is taken as proof of this event. In dealing with discrepancies in the stories of the witnesses, the *Apparitions at Knock* claims that while differences exist in their accounts 'they tell in substance and integrity of detail the same story.' It states: 'No other conclusion can therefore, be arrived at regarding the first Apparition than that it actually has occurred. Let men of learning account for it as they like.' Although the Church had not yet sanctioned the apparition, the author(s) stated that until this happened 'one has fair grounds for believing the whole account of the Apparition to be true, and that some, at least of the miracles are a reality.'[9]

From early 1880 Knock became a popular site of pilgrimage and there were numerous reports of miraculous cures but none of this prompted any action on the part of the archdiocese. Tuam had two archbishops from the end of August 1879 and neither made any public statement on Knock, nor launched a full official inquiry, nor reported it to the Vatican. MacEvilly claimed that MacHale appointed the commission and the ad hoc manner in which it conducted its business seems to suggest this was the case.[10] MacEvilly communicated extensively with Archbishop Edward McCabe of Dublin throughout 1879 and 1880, usually regarding his attempts to consolidate his position in Tuam, and never once alluded to the Knock

[7] MacPhilpin, *Apparitions at Knock*, p. 22.
[8] Walsh, *The Apparition at Knock,* p. 110.
[9] MacPhilpin, *Apparitions at Knock,* pp 25-7.
[10] Hynes, *Knock*, p. 176.

Apparition or the pilgrimages which were taking place.[11] This silence regarding Knock highlights the lack of credibility the hierarchy attached to it. While it was reported that the commission regarded the testimony as satisfactory MacEvilly, in 1881, made it clear that the archdiocese would reserve judgement until the time came for canonically and judicially reviewing 'the whole matter.'[12] It is clear, therefore, that the authorities did not consider the commission's investigation either comprehensive or effective, yet the testimony it produced has formed the basis of accounts of the apparition. The closest thing to a comprehensive inquiry was the second commission of investigation in 1936. However, even the manner in which this commission proceeded served only to enforce Bourke's account. When the three surviving witnesses were interviewed they were read their testimony from the *Apparitions at Knock* and asked if it was correct. Therefore, rather than re-examining the work of the initial investigation, the second commission merely reinforced its dubious conclusions. It did not produce an official endorsement either and the closest Knock got to such an endorsement came with the visit of Pope John Paul II in 1979, which gave de facto approval to the apparition.

[11] John MacEvilly to Edward McCabe, 22 August 1879 (Dublin Diocesan Archive, McCabe Papers, 337/4/i/47), 2 September 1879 (DDA, McCabe Papers, 337/4/i/53), 5 September 1879 (DDA, McCabe Papers, 337/4/i/56), 8 October 1879 (DDA, McCabe Papers, 337/4/i/62), 22 October 1879 (DDA, McCabe Papers, 337/4/i/64, 24 October 1879 (DDA, McCabe Papers, 337/4/i/66, 14 December 1879 (DDA, McCabe Papers, 337/4/i/76), 21 December 1879 (DDA, McCabe Papers, 337/4/i/77), 26 December 1879 (DDA, McCabe Papers, 337/4/i/81), 5 January 1880 (DDA, McCabe Papers, 346/1/i/2, 14 January 1880 (DDA, McCabe Papers, 346/1/i/4), 28 January 1880 (DDA, McCabe Papers, 346/1/i/4/8), 11 February 1880 (DDA, McCabe Papers, 346/1/i/4/13), 16 February 1880 (DDA, McCabe Papers, 346/1/i/4/19), 17 February 1880 (DDA, McCabe Papers, 346/1/i/4/21), 21 February 1880 (DDA, McCabe Papers, 346/1/i/4/27), 23 Febraury 1880 (DDI, McCabe Papers, 1880346/1/i/4/28), 12 March 1880 (DDA, McCabe Papers, 346/1/i/4/29), 12 March 1880 (DDA, McCabe Papers, 346/1/i/4/30), 20 April 1880 (DDA, McCabe Papers, 346/1/i/4/35), 11 May 1880 (DDA, McCabe Papers, 346/1/i/4/42), 30 May 1880 (DDA, McCabe Papers, 346/1/i/4/45), 24 August 1880, DDA, McCabe Papers,346/1/i/4/55), 19 November 1880 (DDA, McCabe Papers, 346/1/i/4/70).

[12] Archbishop MacEvilly to Mother Mary Clare (Mary Francis Cusack), 23 November 1881 (TDA, Gilmartin papers, B4/9-i/5).

The commission of investigation of the 1930s was instigated as part of efforts to revive Knock as a site of pilgrimage. As highlighted by James S. Donnelly, Knock enjoyed a period of popularity in the 1880s and then faded into obscurity.[13] The revival of Knock was spearheaded by William and Judy Coyne, and based on a text created by Bourke. *The Apparitions at Knock* sought to promote the apparition and as such represents a clear conflict of interest between the role of impartial investigator and that of publicist. Bourke was not alone in this and Archdeacon Bartholomew Cavanagh also enthusiastically promoted the apparition. Their role in creating and disseminating the narrative of the apparition, against the backdrop of the challenge to the clergy evident in the land agitation, is more than a coincidence. At the very least they failed to critically examine flawed accounts of the apparition. At worst they played an active role in fabricating it. But, in a more likely scenario, they (Bourke in particular), saw what they wanted to see in the apparition and shaped accounts of it into a form that seemed credible. If they felt the Virgin had interceded they may have convinced themselves that she interceded on their behalf. Both Cavanagh and Bourke had reconciled themselves, somewhat, to the agitation. Bourke had taken a more proactive stance, however, in attempting to ensure that the agitation did not run contrary to the desires of the clergy. The witnesses to the apparition thought, with varying degrees of certainty, that they had seen a supernatural occurrence. The commission reinforced this belief and created a coherent and religiously orthodox version of events. Through his role in producing the *Apparitions at Knock* Bourke developed this narrative and served as an active promoter of Knock. If Knock acted, as *The Apparitions at Knock* stated, as an 'incentive to faith' in an area where the land issue had fanned 'a flame of political

[13] Donnelly, 'Knock: The First Decade'.

and social excitement', it must also have helped to ensure the popular agitation remained inside ecclesiastically approved parameters.[14]

## Methods of investigation

A hallmark of many Marian apparitions is that the parish priest shows scepticism initially but then becomes an advocate.[15] This is a pattern to which Cavanagh conformed; having failed to respond when told of the apparition on the night of 21 August 1879. His housekeeper, Mary McLoughlin, stated in her testimony that she departed the scene at half past eight and returned to the priest's house and 'spoke of the beautiful things that were to be seen at the gable.' She claimed that she told him it would be worth going to see but he 'appeared to make nothing' of what she said and did not go.[16] McLoughlin stated that it was when Cavanagh heard about the apparition the next day he remembered what she had told him and saw its significance. However, as Cavanagh sat on the commission, she was unlikely to say anything that cast him in a negative light. Rev. Francis Lennon, a professor of science at Maynooth, in conducting his own investigation into the apparition, questioned why nobody thought to inform the priest, who was 'only a few perches distant', yet found time to 'assist at the death-bed of a neighbour.'[17] Bourke, too, claimed to have been initially sceptical and told David Comyn that he had not believed in the apparition until he heard the testimony.[18] However, unlike

[14] MacPhilpin, *Apparitions at Knock,* p. 6.
[15] David Blackbourn, *Marpingen: Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (New York, 1994) p. 19; Carroll, *Cult of the Virgin Mary,* p. 166; Ruth Harris, *Lourdes: Body and Spirit in a Secular Age* (London, 1999) p. 17.
[16] MacPhilpin, *Apparitions at Knock,* p. 35.
[17] Rev Francis Lennon to Archdeacon Bartholomew Cavanagh, 16 July 1880 (TDA, Gilmartin papers, B4/9-i/5).
[18] Comyn to Doyle, 28 February 1880 (NLI, Comyn papers, MS 8466(8)).

many Marian apparitions in continental Europe, Knock did not incur hostility from the civil authorities and they did not remark on or respond to the apparition in any way. Therefore the only investigation to which it was subjected which had even the appearance of being official was the commission of investigation in which Bourke participated. The *Apparitions at Knock* stated that the commission 'reported officially that the testimony of all, taken as whole, is trustworthy and satisfactory.'[19] No investigation took place other than the interviewing of witnesses, who gave unsworn testimony.

When Rev. Francis Lennon visited Knock in July 1880, he interviewed four witnesses. While he found one completely unreliable, of the other three he professed an 'unwillingness to accept as sufficient evidence of so important and extraordinary a phenomenon the unsworn testimony of three such witnesses.'[20] Some writers have suggested that Lennon visited before July, was engaged in the investigation carried out by the commission, or carried out extensive tests at Knock to rule out natural explanations for the apparition.[21] However, no reliable evidence supports any of these claims. Reports of the extensive tests he allegedly carried out come from an interview one of the surviving witnesses gave to the Knock revivalist William Coyne in 1936.[22] The only documentary evidence of Lennon's visit is a letter to Cavanagh dated 'Feast of Our Lady of Blessed Mount Carmel' (16 July) and a notebook containing transcripts of testimony from the three witnesses Lennon interviewed, which was discovered among the papers of Sister Mary Francis Cusack in the 1990s

[19] MacPhilpin, *Apparitions at Knock*, p. 15.
[20] Lennon to Cavanagh, 16 July 1880 (TDA, Gilmartin papers, B4/9-i/5).
[21] Donnelly, 'Knock Shrine', p. 56; Paul Carpenter, 'Mimesis, Memory, and the Magic Lantern: What Did the Knock Witnesses See?', *New Hibernia Review*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (Summer, 2011), p. 19; Walsh, *The Apparition at Knock*, p. 76.
[22] Walsh, *The Apparition at Knock*, pp 59-60.

and is dated 1 July.[23] While in his letter Lennon states that he visited Knock and ventures opinions based on his observances and knowledge of science, nowhere does he suggest he carried out tests. The claims attributed to a witness by someone with an active agenda in promoting Knock, nearly sixty years later, do not carry the same weight as actual documentary evidence. The unverified claims of devotional writers can obscure critical examinations of Knock and should be treated with caution. Moreover, their interpretations of Lennon's report have been so selective as to be disingenuous. They have erroneously taken his belief that a magic lantern was not used as an endorsement of the apparition, whereas he was, in fact, highly sceptical.[24] Lennon's scepticism highlights that for those who thought critically, even clergy, the apparition at Knock could withstand very little in the way of analysis.

When the commission of investigation met, six weeks had passed since the apparition. The witnesses, most of whom were related, had ample time to discuss the event amongst themselves and corroborate their stories, consciously or not. Moreover, their parish priests interviewed them and the witnesses seem to have been interviewed in each other's presence. The investigation into Knock fell well short of the standards demanded by canon law. David Blackbourn, whose book on the 1876 apparitions in Marpingen, Germany, is the most comprehensive study of Marian apparitions undertaken, says the most rigorous canonical commissions deliberated for years and that the bishop's vicar-general usually organised them. The vicar-general, Thomas MacHale, played no role in the Knock investigation, but both Bourke and Waldron were canons of Tuam Cathedral and Cavanagh was

[23] Lennon to Cavanagh, 16 July 1880 (TDA, Gilmartin papers, B4/9-i/5); Copy book containing testimony of Mary and Dominick Beirne and Bridget Trench (Knock Shrine Archive, Cavanagh/Cusack Papers, 110).
[24] Lennon to Cavanagh, 16 July 1880 (TDA, Gilmartin papers, B4/9-i/5).

archdeacon, although this was largely an honorary title. According to Blackbourn, in most inquiries the work of the commission lasted years and involved questioning hundreds of witnesses and examining medical evidence, 'both on the state of mind of the visionaries, and on the precise status of any miraculous cures that had been claimed.' He states that apparitions were only officially recognised by the Church 'after the commission of inquiry had satisfied itself deception, vanity, collusion between the persons involved, auto-suggestion, hallucination, and diabolical influence could be excluded from consideration.'[25] Michael Carroll states that the Church exhibits extreme caution in approving miracles and only a handful of the thousands of alleged apparitions have ever been granted ecclesiastical approval. However, this does not count as an endorsement and 'such approval, when it is given, indicates only that there is nothing associated with the apparition that is clearly contrary to Catholic faith or morals, and that there is sufficient evidence to justify a purely human faith in the reality of the apparition.'[26]

Not only was such rigour absent from the investigation into Knock; the commission left little evidence of the inquiries it did make. The original witness testimony was thought lost but in the 1990s a copybook was discovered containing the statements of three of the original witnesses, Judy Campbell, Dominick Beirne, Sr, and the younger Margaret Beirne, more commonly referred to as Maggie.[27] These comprise the only primary evidence remaining of the original commission and there are significant differences between it and the published accounts. This indicates that those involved in recording and disseminating the testimony were more concerned

[25] Blackbourn, *Marpingen*, p. 35.
[26] Carroll, *Cult of the Virgin*, p. 116.
[27] Eugene Hynes 'Chalice in a Bog or Fools Gold?' and John White 'Author's Reply', *History Ireland*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Spring, 1997).

with creating a polished version for public consumption than critically examining what had occurred. The testimony of Maggie Beirne demonstrates the changes that occurred between the versions. The version in the *Apparitions at Knock* gives a short preamble in the first person that focuses on where she lived and her relationship to Mary Beirne. This is absent from the handwritten account. Both versions state that she went to lock the chapel at about 7:30pm, but use very different language. In the original testimony she claimed that she was returning home when she 'saw something white at the gable but passed no notice of it at the time.'[28] The *Apparitions at Knock* stated: 'I saw something luminous or bright at the south gable, but it never entered my head that it was necessary to see or enquire what it was.'[29] However, the published testimony contains omissions as well as additions. Maggie Beirne, in her testimony of 8 October, claimed that she saw a mitre on the head of St John and that St Joseph had 'whiskers of a greyish colour.' She specifically mentioned that the mitre was 'like what the A. Bishop wears' and said she recognised him from a statue in Lekanvey chapel.[30] She and her mother had just returned from Lekanvey, which is a coastal town beside another famous pilgrimage site, Croagh Patrick.[31] Maggie Beirne's testimony mentions seeing an altar as part of the apparition, but she said that she did not see the lamb or cross on top of it that other witnesses claimed to have seen. However, this statement was crossed out. The original testimony states that a 'bright light' surrounded the altar and the figures, whereas the published account said 'they were surrounded by a bright light, nay, with a light at times sparkling.'[32]

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[28] Testimony of Maggie Beirne (KSA, Cavanagh/Cusack papers, 112).
[29] MacPhilpin, *Apparitions at Knock*, p. 45.
[30] Testimony of Maggie Beirne (KSA, Cavanagh/Cusack papers, 112).
[31] Mary O'Connell, née Beirne, testimony to second commission of investigation (TDA, Gilmartin papers, B4/9-i/5).
[32] Testimony of Maggie Beirne (KSA, Cavanagh/Cusack papers, 112); MacPhilpin, *Apparitions at*

The testimony of Dominick Beirne, Sr also survives. There are certain statements in Maggie Beirne's testimony omitted from the published version which appear in his testimony. They include statements that St John wore a mitre, St Joseph had grey whiskers, the figures were clothed in white and Mary wore a cloak. In the published testimony Dominick Beirne, Sr is said to have claimed: 'The reason I had for calling the third figure St John is because some saw his statue or likeness at Lekanvey Parish chapel.'[33] It makes no mention of Maggie Beirne's claim to have seen this statue. Maggie Beirne's handwritten testimony also said she spent only fifteen minutes at the chapel and that there were only five people present at the time. However, in the *Apparitions at Knock* this statement is also attributed to Dominick Beirne. It is hard to say whether the writer or editor of the *Apparitions at Knock* became so carried away that he decided to make composite testimonies for narrative purposes or if he erroneously attributed some of Maggie Beirne's testimony to Dominick Beirne, Sr because they were recorded in the same copy book, one after the other, and he mistakenly transcribed from the wrong page. Even if this was the case it shows scant attention to detail.

The *Apparitions at Knock* became the principal text for accounts of the apparition, but another publication with slightly different versions of the testimony soon followed it. T.D. Sullivan, proprietor of the *Nation* and the *Weekly News*, published *The Illustrated Record of the Apparitions at the Church of Knock* in April 1880. Although Sullivan is often credited as author of this work, Eugene Hynes provides convincing proof that its author was a journalist named Thomas Sexton. This book, a revision of reports from the *Nation* and *Weekly News*, contains two

*Knock*, p. 45.
[33] Ibid., p. 46.

versions of testimony, one based on interviews the journalist conducted with some of the witnesses and the other based on testimony from the commission of investigation. These versions, along with the MacPhilpin testimony, all differ from each other. While Hynes deduces that Sexton received his copy of the testimony from Cavanagh it is just as likely he received it from Bourke. [34]

Sexton, and his employer, Sullivan, were in no way unbiased and this work enthusiastically promoted the apparition. Differences exist between all the versions of testimony and theirs is by no means a paradigm of journalistic integrity. T.D Sullivan and his brother A.M. Sullivan supported Archbishop MacHale and were prominent constitutional nationalists. When MacHale wrote his letter to the organisers of the Ballyhaunis land meeting condemning the 'strolling men' he stated his belief that the Sullivans were more suitable leaders of the people.[35] In addition, Bourke had a long-running association with the *Nation*, having originally published his easy lessons in it and T.D. Sullivan had sat on the committee of the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language. As the next chapter demonstrates, Bourke liaised closely with Sexton. For this reason this thesis pays particular attention to the reportage of Sexton published in the *Weekly News* and the *Nation* and collected into the *Illustrated Record of the Apparitions at Knock.* The level of embellishment in the testimony of Mary McLoughlin in the *Illustrated Record of the Apparitions at Knock* demonstrates the bias of the author. It varies significantly from the *Apparitions at Knock*, with what seems to be considerable elaboration in the former. In the Sexton account not only did she mention seeing what she thought were statues at the south gable of the chapel while *en route* to the Beirne house, it was claimed she remained

[34] Hynes, *Knock*, p. 181.
[35] *Connaught Telegraph,* 12 July 1879; *Freeman's Journal,* 10 July 1879.

there for five minutes before going on to the Beirne residence and the figures were described in great detail. The *Apparitions at Knock* lacks this detail. In the Sexton version she says she remained at the Beirne house for half an hour and on returning she and Mary Beirne both beheld the figures, but 'more fully and more brightly.'[36] The level of detail present in the Sexton book, but missing from the other account, is tremendous and has been embellished by someone trying to make the story more credible.

Factual differences are also present. The *Tuam News* publication states that McLoughlin said she saw a five-week-old lamb on an altar. However, in the Sexton account the lamb is described as a newly weaned lamb a 'fortnight to three weeks old'.[37] This detail has to be an invention of the journalist as no rural dweller in nineteenth-century Ireland could possibly have thought a lamb could be weaned as young as two or three weeks. Whether Sexton simply employed journalistic licence for effect or attempted to increase credibility of accounts for his own agenda is difficult to discern. However, it demonstrates that he was as unreliable a narrator as Bourke, Cavanagh, or MacPhilpin. However, Patrick Hill did describe the lamb as being about eight weeks old, a more reasonable age for weaning.[38] In reproducing the testimony of Maggie Beirne and Dominick Beirne, Sr the Sexton account is more true to the originals in that it does not erroneously attribute parts of Maggie Beirne's statement to Dominick Beirne, Sr. In this version, the time given for her leaving her house to go to the church is seven o'clock and it also refers to her seeing 'something

[36] Sexton, *Illustrated Record of the Apparitions,* p. 21.
[37] Ibid.
[38] MacPhilpin, *Apparitions at Knock*, p. 31.

white' at the gable.[39] This version also describes the mitre as 'like what the bishop wears' and stated that she had seen a statue of St John at Lekanvey.

## Memory and Expectation

The level of embellishment in published accounts of the apparition shows testimony was altered prior to publication, however, Bourke did not simply influence the narrative of Knock by changing the testimony after it had been dictated. He also shaped the testimony through his role in questioning the witnesses. Psychologists advise legal professionals who deal with eyewitnesses that 'there is little doubt that human recollection can be supplemented, partly restructured, and even completely altered by post event inputs. It is susceptible to the power of the simple word.'[40] When we witness an event we do not simply record it as if on a video camera. Most theoretical analyses of the process of memory formation divide it into three major stages. The first is called the *acquisition* stage, where the witness perceives an event and information enters the memory system. The *retention* stage is the period between this and the *retrieval* stage, when the witness tries to recall the stored information. In every one of these stages factors can influence the shaping of memory. In the acquisition stage these include lighting, duration of the event, stress and expectations. In the retention stage the memories are influenced by factors including the length of the retention interval and post-event information that the witness is exposed to. At retrieval, factors that shape memory include the method of questioning and the confidence level of the witness.[41] Bourke's intervention was part

[39] Sexton, *Illustrated Record of the Apparitions,* p. 23.
[40] Elizabeth F. Loftus, James M. Doyle and Jennifer E. Dysart, *Eyewitness Testimony: Civil and Criminal*, 4th edn (Dayton, 2007), p. 69.
[41] Ibid., p. 13.

of a chain of processes which created a coherent version of events. By the time he interviewed the witnesses they had already moved through the initial stages of the process.

As one is acquiring the information which forms the basis of memory, expectation can influence interpretation. Witnesses are influenced not just by what they see, but what they expect to see and 'such biases play a role in the perception of all sorts of incidents'[42] Due to a number of high-profile contemporary apparitions the witnesses at Knock have been primed to interpret a visual stimulus as a Marian apparition. Apparitions widely reported in the 1870s included Pontmain in France in 1871 and Marpingen in Germany in 1876. Lennon stated that Lourdes was widely discussed in the area and believed that this could have contributed to a delusion.[43] People in Knock had the expectation of an apparition, as expressed in the *Apparitions at Knock.* The Blessed Virgin had visited numerous sites in Europe, 'Why, then, should not faithful Ireland, so devoted to the saviour of mankind and to his holy mother be not similarly favoured by her heavenly presence?'[44] This belief may have been widespread and David Comyn wrote to J.J. Doyle: 'Your remarks remind me of what Father Nolan said when I asked him about the apparitions – that after being everywhere else it was only fair they should visit us as (at least in modern days) we have been as strangely neglected by celestial as of royal visitors. He will be going down there [Knock] soon.'[45] Psychologists state that simply reading about phenomena in newspapers can increase a person's belief in them.[46] People believe what they read in the newspapers, the visionaries at Knock had read about Marian

[42] Ibid., p. 36.
[43] Lennon to Cavanagh, 16 July 1880 (TDA, Gilmartin papers, B4/9-i/5).
[44] MacPhilpin, *Apparitions at Knock*, p. 4.
[45] Comyn to Doyle, 28 February 1880 (NLI, Comyn papers, MS 8466(8)).
[46] Susan Clancy, *Abducted: How People Come to Believe They Were Kidnapped by Aliens* (Cambridge Ma., 2005), p. 6.

apparitions in newspapers, and if Mary visited France and Germany, why not Ireland? Beyond the expectation of a Marian apparition, they had a general openness to the supernatural. According to one account from a Knock resident who left in 1849, there was a belief in the power of fairies in the area and priests were thought to have supernatural powers.[47] The *Apparitions at Knock* stated that 'the children of the faith see nothing wonderful at all in these manifestations. It is to them something that they expected, or if they did not actually expect their coming at this time and place, they see nothing incongruous in the fact that they have occurred.'[48]

However, the fact there was the expectation of an apparition does not mean that all the witnesses initially believed they had seen one. That not all those present were convinced of the veracity of the apparition is evidenced by the amount of time they spent there. Patrick Beirne was sixteen years old at the time of the apparition and a relative of many of the other witnesses. He claimed: 'I remained only ten minutes, and then I went away. All of this happened between a quarter or so past eight o'clock and half-past nine.'[49] When Beirne was interviewed by the second commission in 1936 he denied that he had only remained a few minutes. He now stated that he had been present from nine o'clock until twenty minutes past ten, a much later time than anybody had originally claimed. He also stated that he had attempted to touch the figures but had felt only the wall.[50] Mary McLoughlin also remained only a short time before returning to the priest's house and, although she allegedly told him about the apparition, it must not have been a convincing enough account for him to go to the church. Maggie Beirne remained only fifteen minutes

[47] Diary of Daniel Campbell, Knock Museum.
[48] MacPhilpin, *Apparitions at Knock*, p. 9.
[49] MacPhilpin, *Apparitions at Knock,* p. 39.
[50] Patrick Byrne testimony to second commission of investigation (TDA, Gilmartin papers, B4/9-i/5).

and her niece, Catherine Murray, between twenty and thirty. There were, therefore, additional processes at work which over time made those witnesses more certain they had seen an apparition.

The Knock witnesses may not have intentionally fabricated the event but 'it is common for a witnesses' thoughts to bend in a self-advantageous direction. The strong influence of wishes and desires can be quite unconscious.'[51] The Knock visionaries stood to attain significant social standing from having seen an apparition. Accounts of apparitions in the media highlighted the centrality of the visionary. A case in point is the celebrity achieved by Bernadette Soubirous at Lourdes and the name of Catherine Labouré, who claimed to have seen the Blessed Virgin in a Paris convent, had recently become known after remaining secret for forty years. The Knock visionaries achieved a certain level of celebrity. Journalists interviewed them and the Beirne household, as Sexton stated, was full of visitors who wanted to hear about the apparition. Furthermore, as highlighted in the next chapter, the local area stood to gain financially from pilgrims and it has benefited significantly to the present day. Rev. Francis Lennon, who interviewed both Dominick and Mary Beirne, highlighted the family ties between the witnesses as problematic in determining the truth of events and said that they were 'directly interested' in the matter, a likely reference to their practice of taking in paying guests. [52] Therefore, unconscious self-interest may have helped those witnesses who were initially sceptical to come to genuinely believe they had seen an apparition.

Susan Clancy says it is difficult to disprove a deeply held belief, no matter how little evidence exists to support it, because 'once the seed of belief was planted'

[51] Loftus, Doyle and Dysart, *Eyewitness Testimony*, p. 67.
[52] Lennon to Cavanagh, 16 July 1880 (TDA, Gilmartin papers, B4/9-i/5).

people 'began to search for confirmatory evidence.'[53] The 'seed of belief' planted on the evening of 21 August 1879 would have sprouted over the following weeks as it received nourishment from discussions of the apparition. Post-event information can lead to what is described as *interference* in memories. Often after witnessing an event the witness is exposed to new information about it and 'experiences such as these can dramatically affect our memory of the original event.' New information can alter a memory and false information can supplement or transform it.[54] This new information could have arisen through conversation with other witnesses and through second-hand accounts, but even the process of being interviewed would have influenced memory. Six weeks passed between the alleged apparition and the witness interviews. The passage of time is a key factor in memory distortion and as memory fades witness suggestibility increases. As time passed the witnesses would have had less access to vivid memories and their ability to recognise misleading information in questions and avoid incorporating it into their answers became reduced.[55]

A crucial factor in distorting memories was the witnesses own desire to have seen a Marian apparition. Confirmation bias is a 'tendency to seek or interpret evidence favourable to existing belief, and to ignore or reinterpret unfavourable evidence.'[56] The witnesses, when viewing and then recalling the scene at the church, may have fallen victim to confirmation bias, but it is likely the interviewers did too. It can lead interviewers to act to verify 'preferred hypotheses, rather than conducting objective searches for facts.'[57] The legal concept of 'leading questions'

[53] Clancy, *Abducted*, p. 51.
[54] Loftus, Doyle and Dysart, *Eyewitness Testimony*, pp 56, 59 & 62.
[55] C.J. Brainerd and V.F. Reyna, *The Science of False Memory* (Oxford, 2005), p. 36; Loftus, Doyle and Dysart, *Eyewitness Testimony*, p. 65.
[56] Clancy, *Abducted,* p. 51
[57] Brainerd and Rayne, *False Memory,* p. 384.

acknowledges that the phrasing of questions can suggest an answer.[58] Regarding eyewitness testimony, Loftus, Dysart, and Doyle state that 'the answer one receives depends on the question one asks, but very few people are fully aware of how pervasive the influence of the question can be.'[59] It can occur unconsciously and, even though the interviewer may believe he/she simply gathers facts, the hypotheses suggested by the interviewer can influence interviewees.[60] If Bourke and the other clergymen had a clear idea of what an apparition should look like, they may have helped the witnesses create this image through their questions. False memories can develop in any situation in which misleading information is conveyed to participants and their imaginations are stimulated. Visualising and imagining things that didn't happen 'is an excellent way to start thinking they did.'[61] Even if an eyewitness remembers certain details very well, others will be less clear and the desire to assist the investigator can encourage witnesses to rely on external supports to enrich their fragmentary memories. [62] We do not know what questions the commission asked, but the cohesiveness of the testimony produced and its subsequent editing strongly indicates that they were leading questions.

In order to state that Bourke had, even unconsciously, shaped the witness testimony it is necessary to prove that he had a special devotion to the Blessed Virgin and a belief in her power to intercede. While both sceptics and devotees of the apparition have highlighted Cavanagh's devotion to the Blessed Virgin, this reputation may have developed after the fact (the next chapter examines the role of the *Apparitions at Knock* in fostering this image). There is, however, significant

[58] Ibid., p. 34; Loftus, Doyle and Dysart, *Eyewitness Testimony*, p. 71.
[59] Loftus, Doyle and Dysart, *Eyewitness Testimony*, p. 70.
[60] Brainerd and Reyna, *False Memory*, p. 385.
[61] Clancy, *Abducted*, pp 63 & 65.
[62] Brainerd and Reyna, *False Memory*, p. 34.

proof of Bourke's relationship to Marianism, as exemplified in his translation of the *Bull Ineffabilis,* the 1854 Papal decree on the Immaculate Conception, into Irish in 1868. As a dedication it featured a verse by Bourke that described Mary as 'Beloved daughter of the eternal Father, Pure Mother of the Eternal Son, Spotless Spouse of the Holy Ghost, the most perfect of created beings on earth or in Heaven.' This work was Bourke's contribution to the pope's desire to have the doctrine translated into all languages. However, the introduction contained evidence of Bourke's personal devotion to the Virgin. He placed devotion to Mary on a par with devotion to Jesus and said that in publishing on her greatness, as attested to in scripture and proclaimed on by the pope, the faithful could obtain 'a more exalted idea of the infinite greatness of the Son and of the supreme excellence of the Mother' and they could be encouraged to 'love both Son and Mother with more ardent affection.' Bourke claimed the Papal Bull was intended to settle all disputes on the topic, 'to repel and to crush all attacks of heretical foes' and encourage devotion to the Blessed Virgin.[63]

In enunciating on the Immaculate Conception Bourke merely reiterated what the pope had decreed fourteen years earlier, but he also highlighted his fundamental belief in the centrality of Mary to the Catholic faith. He claimed the decree set Mary, 'after the lapse of centuries, in her proper position before the children of the world – on summits of the eternal hills, on which, even before creation, her abode was fixed.' Knock literally means hill, a point emphasised in the *Apparitions at Knock.* After deploying more superlatives than are fit to repeat here to describe the Blessed Virgin, Bourke stated that she was 'the source of all manner of blessings' and had grace

[63] Ulick Bourke, *The Bull "Ineffabilis" in Four Languages; or the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary Defined* (Dublin, 1868), pp iii & vii-viii.

superior to all creatures and inferior only to God. That he viewed her as the source of blessings highlights his belief in her power to intercede. In an acknowledgement that not all may share his enthusiasm for the Virgin, he stated in a footnote that 'many captious Christians, who are ever theologically learned, or who, on the other hand, have some of the cold blood of heretics permeating their veins' might question her power. He countered these critics by stating that St Bernard, St Alphonsus, and St Thomas all attested to her power. It seems Bourke, who more often than not was inclined to push his academic qualifications, could dismiss purely academic knowledge when it suited his argument. While, as we have already seen, Bourke felt the Irish language could promote harmony between Catholic and Protestant, after outlining the supposed veracity of the Immaculate Conception, he said: 'On this account how unphilosophical, how false, how much opposed to the dignity of Jesus, how base, how vile—nay, how foul, fiendish, and springing from hell itself is the picture which Protestants and all heretics give of our Blessed Lady and glorious Immaculate Mother.'[64] As always, Bourke's allegiances depended on the context in which he spoke.

While not referring directly to Marian apparitions that had taken place there, Bourke described France as a 'Catholic nation' and said that 'foremost then amongst the nations in publishing the praises of our Immaculate Queen are the French people.' He said Monsieur L'Abbé Sire, who had begun the mission of translating the *Bull* into vernacular languages had asked him to do for 'poor Catholic Ireland' what had been done for Catholic France. He felt honoured to translate into 'the language of missionary, faithful, Catholic Scotia—the decree which, amongst men, placed the last brilliant in the wreath of glory which encircles the brow of the Immaculate

[64] Ibid., pp viii-x.

Queen of Heaven.'[65] Here Bourke, as is his wont, clearly associated his work with the work of ancient Irish scribes and missionaries, and portrayed them all as having a higher purpose. This raises the question as to whether he felt his work on Knock had a higher purpose, or if indeed he felt his translation of the *Bull Ineffabilis* had encouraged Mary to visit Ireland. We can be certain, however, that when Bourke sat on the commission of investigation he had a belief in the power of the Blessed Virgin and the expectation of an apparition.

## Patrick Hill – Bourke's Star Witness

Further proof that it was Bourke who, of all the priests on the commission, played the greatest role in shaping the narrative of the apparition can be seen in the testimony of the witness to whom he was closest, his parishioner and neighbour, Patrick Hill. The *Apparitions at Knock* described Hill as

> a young frank intelligent boy, of about thirteen years of age. His account of the apparition is the fullest and most satisfactory. It extends to even the minutest details. To all who question him he replies with an open childlike simplicity of manner, and with the readiness of one who knows and who feels that he is certain of what he tells.

Hill stated that he had been on the bog drawing turf on the day of the apparition and had gone to the house of his aunt who lived in Knock. This was the house of the elder Dominick Beirne. He claimed that around eight o'clock Dominick Beirne, Jr came to the house and said 'come up to the chapel and see the miraculous lights and

[65] Ibid., pp x & xii.

beautiful visions that are to be seen there.' Hill, his uncle, his six-year-old cousin John Curry, and a casual labourer named John Durkan followed him to the church. Hill's testimony is the most extensive and detailed and provides clear evidence of the intervention of a narrator. As a resident of Claremorris it is likely that, of all the witnesses, Hill had the most contact with Bourke. Furthermore, as a thirteen-year-old Hill was around the age at which Catholics make confirmation and this involved extensive preparations under the guidance of a priest. Hill's testimony contains every aspect of the complete apparition. He claimed to see the three figures, an altar, lamb and cross, angels and stars, all of which were bathed in light. No other witness described so many components of the apparition and Hill is the only one who claimed to have seen angels and even to have seen their wings 'fluttering'. He also claimed to have seen a rose on the head of Mary and the text of the gospel that John the Evangelist held. Dominick Beirne, Sr said that he saw angels 'traced or carved' onto the lower part of the altar.[66] Of all the adult witnesses, Dominick Beirne was most closely related to Patrick Hill. It may not be a coincidence that these two witnesses both mentioned angels.

Some of the information contained in Hill's testimony may have been of his own invention, such as the claim that the lamb was 'the size of a lamb eight weeks old', but others clearly show the guiding hand of the narrator. Some of the detail is presented in the first person, but in terms that seem out of keeping with a person of his age and location, such as 'the crown appeared brilliant, and of a golden brightness, of a deeper hue, inclined to mellow yellow, than the striking whiteness of the robes she wore.' While language such as this shows the input of the narrator, the text makes his intervention explicit when it says: 'I saw her eyes, the balls, the pupil,

[66] MacPhilpin, *Apparitions at Knock,* pp 29-33 & 46.

the Irish of each – [the boy did not know those special names of those special parts of the eye, but pointed to them, and described them in his own way].' Rather than making the commission of investigation wary of accepting his testimony this level of detail made them regard Hill's testimony as the fullest, as 'no phosphoric or electric action could bring out the distinct brightness in the pupil of the eye, or the minute distinctness in the lettering of the Book of Gospels.'[67] None of Cavanagh's parishioners gave the same level of detail as Hill. This could result from the fact that Hill was interrogated more often, asked more leading questions and hence was most influenced by post-event information. This indicates that Bourke had a more active role in shaping the testimony than Cavanagh. In the *Apparitions at Knock*, the testimony of Hill is the only one signed by a witness, U.J. Bourke, and dated 8 October.

That Bourke had a tendency to embellish oral accounts to further his own argument is demonstrated by a five page anecdote reproduced in the *Aryan Origins.* This story told of a time when Thomas MacHale, travelling from Paris to Tuam in 1864, was waiting on a train on the platform at Euston Station, London. He came upon a girl who he perceived to be Irish but when he attempted to speak to her in Irish, she claimed not to understand, though it later transpired she did speak Irish. While the lesson of this story was that Irish people were often ashamed of their language, the manner of its conveyance is more significant. Bourke did not have a written account from MacHale as he claimed he had 'heard it told' yet he reproduced in minute detail intricacies of the story such as the manner of the girl's dress, skin tone and the appearance of the elderly man with whom she was travelling. He reconstructed the conversation of the participants, in English and Irish and even

[67] Ibid., pp 31-3.

described the facial expressions of the characters. It demonstrates that Bourke was sufficiently creative to take the bones of someone else's oral account and flesh it out, and he could be motivated to do so when attempting to convey a particular message.[68]

Many reporters travelling to Knock disembarked at Claremorris railway station and called directly to Bourke. He summoned Patrick Hill to meet these journalists and give his account of the apparition. The reporter from the London *Daily Telegraph* described him as about fourteen years of age and 'a bright, intelligent little fellow.'[69] An account from Fr Francis Lennon casts Hill's reliability as a witness in serious doubt. Lennon remained unconvinced of the supernatural nature of the apparition and interviewed three witnesses, Mary and Dominick Beirne, and Bridget Trench, whose testimony he found satisfactory but said of Hill that he regarded his statement as of 'little or no value.'[70] However, he did not elaborate further on this. That he placed so little value on Hill's statement raises questions about Bourke's continued use of him to promote the apparition.

## The Possibility of Deception

The commission of investigation did not consider alternative explanations for the apparition and the *Apparitions at Knock*, in publishing the testimony, actively argued for its credibility. In order to deal with sceptics, the author(s) put forward a number of explanations and then discounted them. Natural explanations fit broadly into two groups. The first is that the apparition was the product of deceit, produced

[68] Bourke, *Aryan Origins*, pp 69-74.
[69] MacPhilpin, *Apparitions at Knock*, p. 55.
[70] Lennon to Cavanagh, 16 July 1880 (TDA, Gilmartin papers, B4/9-i/5).

either by a magic lantern or by the application of phosphorous paint. The second group of explanations state that the alleged apparition was in fact either an hallucination or an illusion stimulated by a natural occurrence.

The hypothesis that the apparition was produced using a magic lantern, an early form of projector, has remained the most enduring. It has many appealing elements and represents a simple solution: a cynical individual tricked gullible and backward peasants using modern technology. Over the years suggestions have been made that either an Italian photographer or a Protestant policeman used a magic lantern to create the apparition, but no evidence has ever been produced to move these theories beyond conjecture.[71] Since the 1980s Cavanagh has been cast as the illusionist.[72] The *Apparitions at Knock* pointed to a number of flaws in the magic lantern theory. It said that anyone who had seen Knock chapel would know that to project an image on to it is impossible. The nearest place where a lantern could have been placed was thirty yards away and when the apparition began it was still daylight.[73] Journalists who visited Knock, including Sexton, supported this point. The most common argument made against the possibility of a magic lantern was that there was nowhere to conceal it and no suitable 'perch'. The nearest building was the schoolhouse at the perimeter wall, but it was not a suitable location due to the position of the windows. The *Apparitions at Knock* also argued that the witnesses would have noticed the light from the projector, and that their shadows would have blocked it.

[71] Canon James Clenaghan to Archbishop Gilmartin, Feast of Corpus Christi 1936 (TDA, Gilmartin papers, B4/9-1/8); Rev. Michael P. O'Carroll to Liam Coyne (KSA, Coyne papers 295).
[72] David Berman, 'The Knock Apparition: Some New Evidence', *The New Humanist*, Vol. 102, No. 4 (1987), pp 8-10.
[73] MacPhilpin, *Apparitions at Knock*, p. 26.

The appeal of the magic lantern as an explanation has not been diminished by lack of evidence. The enduring effect of the argument can be seen in David Berman's 1979 and 1987 articles.[74] Berman contended that Cavanagh was responsible for perpetrating a hoax using a magic lantern as he needed to bolster his authority in the parish following his denunciation of the Land War. In 1987 a Channel 4 documentary, *Is Anybody There?,* directed by Christopher Hale and presented by psychologist Nicholas Humphrey, investigated a number of paranormal phenomena and posited natural explanations for them. Two of these related to Marian events in Ireland, the moving statue at Ballinspittle, Co. Cork, in the 1980s, and the Knock apparition. While a convincing explanation for Ballinspittle was given, involving lighting and perception, the presenter stated with confidence that, while there may have been no position for a magic lantern outside the chapel, it was possible it was located on a ledge in the sacristy and that a mirror angled the image down to the wall. With remarkably little further research, other than stating that Cavanagh had denounced political violence, he declared the case solved.[75] However, the idea that the magic lantern stood inside the church does not account for the fact that the Beirne family had the keys to the chapel and locked it each evening. Based on his own experience with photography and projection Paul Carpenter states of this theory 'that while this technique would have been possible outside a stage setting, the difficulties encountered in casting an image are so numerous that a regime of site-specific testing would have been required in order to have concealed a lantern'[76] It would therefore have been impossible to install a magic lantern discreetly.

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[74] Berman, 'The Knock Apparition: Some New Evidence'. David Berman, 'Papal Visit Resurrects Ireland's Knock Legend', *The Freethinker,* Vol. 99, No.10, pp 145-7 & 160.
[75] Christopher Hale (dir.) *'Is Anybody There?'*(Channel 4, 1987) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qdOWChIXgd8 [accessed 2015/19/03].
[76] Carpenter, 'Mimesis', p. 109.

Berman augments his theory that Cavanagh was responsible for the apparition by reproducing an account from Sister Mary Francis Cusack where she told of seeing a stone that reflected the sun, giving the appearance of a supernatural light, behind the altar at Knock. She claimed that when she asked Cavanagh to remove this stone he refused. This story, however, does not detail the falling out between Cavanagh and Cusack and the general bad feeling that surrounded her departure form Knock, which the next chapter alludes to in greater detail. Berman also feels that Cavanagh's failure to attend the apparition when told of it further implicates him. He states that he does not suggest Cavanagh himself operated the lantern, but believes he may have hired someone else to project the image.[77] If there was a conspiracy, a magic lantern could have been procured from St Jarlath's, which had owned one since 1867.[78] However, this would have involved a large number of people knowing the lantern was in use. It would have had to have been taken form the college, transported, installed and then removed. In addition, that there was a magic lantern nearby, and there had been for over a decade, shows that it was not an unfamiliar technology in the area and the witnesses may not have been as easily deceived as some suggest. Magic lanterns and slides were widely advertised in newspapers at the time and any literate person may have known of them, even if they had not seen one themselves.[79]

Paul Carpenter's 'Mimesis, Memory, and the Magic Lantern: What Did the Knock Witnesses See?' states that while the apparition had many attributes of a magic lantern projection he does not believe it was a deception. He contends that the

[77] Berman, 'Papal Visit', p. 8.
[78] Cunningham, *St Jarlath's*, p. 77
[79] For example, advertisements for magic lanterns were a weekly feature on the back page of the *Nation* throughout the period.

description in the MacPhilpin book of the light flickering fits with a magic lantern projection and cites a Limerick reporter whose February 1880 account stated that the image fitted inside a concentric circle.[80] This, apparently, was also an attribute of early magic lanterns. Furthermore, Carpenter maintains that if Cavanagh had wanted to perpetrate a hoax, Aghamore church would have provided a better venue. While Carpenter feels that a magic lantern could not have been used, he contends that through a process of mimesis the seers merged the events of this night with the events of another time and retroactively applied attributes to the image which were not present. He highlights accounts that indicate Lennon carried out research with a magic lantern at Knock and claims he may have carried out tests before the commission sat. However, this is unlikely as all evidence suggests Lennon visited in July 1880 and no evidence shows that Lennon, or anyone else, carried out tests with a magic lantern.[81]

Lennon did state the possibility of deception with a magic lantern was improbable, if not impossible, as it would have been easily detected. However, he did not rule out the possibility that phosphorescent paint, which would absorb light during the day and emit it at night, could have been applied. He said: 'I can easily conceive some skilful artist with his paint-pot and brush in one pocket and his magnesium-lamp in the other, practising his hand in secret on the gable-wall of Knock chapel.'[82] He believed the image could have escaped detection until darkness set in. The *Apparitions at Knock* discounted the possibility of phosphorescent paint. It claimed that as it was raining the surface would have been wet so no light would have emitted from the phosphorous and that 'the glowing light of phosphor is

[80] Carpenter, 'Mimesis', p. 105.
[81] Lennon to Cavanagh, 16 July 1880 (TDA, Gilmartin papers, B4/9-i/5).
[82] Ibid.

yellowish; this seen on the apparition of the night was white.' The author also stated that phosphorescent paint would ignite during the day in the hands of even the most cautious artist and would not be seen from thirty yards away. The *Apparitions at Knock* also stated that such paint is prone to fluctuation and the rain would have prevented it emitting light.[83] Sexton felt that the possibility of an artist skilled enough to compose the figures having the time to do so was 'absurd.'[84]

While the fact that it was alleged to have been raining at the time of the apparition has often been used to discount natural explanations, such as a projection or phosphorescent paint, one piece of evidence indicates it may not have been raining. In her interview with Thomas Sexton, Mary Beirne stated that she returned to the house to fetch her brother Dominick but he did not want to come straight away as he was tired from mowing all day.[85] This statement, that Dominick had being mowing hay, calls into question accounts that said it had rained heavily that day. Put simply, hay is made when the sun shines. Some, though not all of the witnesses, said it had been raining throughout the day, but even if it had only begun in the evening it would have been apparent to Dominick that rain was imminent and he would have ceased mowing. Either it was not raining or Dominick was not mowing hay. If the former scenario is true then the claim of rain was invented in order to undermine natural explanations for the apparition. If the latter scenario is true, then it raises questions about the reliability of Mary Beirne's memory.

One other suggestion made in recent times comes from Margaret Crawford who, in what Donnelly describes as a 'famous footnote', stated that County Mayo

[83] MacPhilpin, *Knock*, p. 26.
[84] Sexton, *Illustrated Record of the Apparitions*, p. 11.
[85] Ibid., p.13.

was ‘heavily dependent on relief rations of Indian meal in 1879-80 and in the parish of Knock 77 per cent of the population existed on relief rations in March 1880.’ [86] She feels that widespread pellagra symptoms indicate that the apparition could have been the result of hallucinations brought on by an Indian meal diet. Neither Donnelly nor Hynes indulge this piece of speculation. Donnelly asserts there is no evidence to suggest any of the visionaries were reduced to a diet of Indian meal, while Hynes claims there was not yet any famine at the time of the apparition.[87] Donnelly points out that the Beirnes were relatively free from want and that, as housekeeper to the priest, McLoughlin would not have depended on an Indian meal diet either. He does admit that even devotees of the shrine saw the connection between distress and the apparition as the reason for Mary’s intervention, because of ‘her desire to provide succour and consolation to those effected by extraordinary material distress.’[88]

## Lights

In addition to arguing against the possibility of deception, the *Apparitions at Knock* attempted to refute a number of natural phenomena that could have been mistaken for an apparition. It stated claims had been made that reflected light caused the apparent apparition, but the writer maintained that such reflections usually took place in clouds, not on gables, and that they generally only last a few seconds. Claims that some effect of electricity produced the apparition are described as ‘fanciful’. The writer asked why, if it happened at that time, lights were not seen

[86] Margaret Crawford, ‘Indian Meal and Pellagra in Nineteenth Century Ireland’, in M. Goldstrom and L.A. Clarkson (eds), *Irish Population, Economy and Society: Essays in Honour of the Late K.H. Connell* (Oxford, 1981), p. 131.
[87] Hynes, *Knock*, p. 138.
[88] Donnelly, ‘Marian Shrine’, p. 57.

more often. However, as highlighted in the next chapter, people reported seeing lights in or around the chapel at Knock in the months that followed. Another natural source of light which the *Tuam News* believed improbable was 'natural miasmatic gustations from the earth below.'[89] However, the suggestion that the ignition of gases escaping from a subterranean environment could cause luminescence is not one that should be discounted. Likewise, atmospheric conditions can produce light.

Patrick Walsh was an exception to the group of witnesses. He was not present at the chapel itself. Instead he claimed that he was on his farm at about nine o'clock when at a distance of half a mile from the church he saw a light over the chapel. He claimed it was a large globe of golden light that was stationary and circular in appearance.[90] The version produced in Sexton is nearly identical to that recounted in the *Tuam News* publication with the only exception being that the former describes the light as brilliant rather than golden. The fact that Walsh was at a distance and not influenced by the Beirnes means that his may be the most accurate testimony. Donnelly gives credence to Carroll's suggestion that the light seen by Patrick Walsh 'strongly suggests some atmospheric phenomenon.'[91] While all the witnesses claimed the apparition was illuminated, one other testimony mentions seeing only a light. Maggie Beirne claimed to have left her house at around seven o'clock to go to the chapel and lock it. On her way home she saw something 'luminous or bright at the south gable' of the church.[92] However, she did not investigate it. The fact that she, when unaccompanied or unguided, saw something she described as brightness supports the idea that there was some sort of

[89] MacPhilpin, *Apparitions at Knock*, pp 25 & 27.
[90] Ibid., p. 39.
[91] Donnelly, 'Marian Shrine', p. 58.
[92] MacPhilpin, *Knock*, p. 45.

luminescence present. Her statement of what she saw when at the gable with others is more complete. However, the fact that Maggie Beirne remained only fifteen minutes at the church indicates she may not, at the time, have been entirely convinced by what she saw.

Carroll says that while the terms illusion and hallucination are used interchangeably in everyday speech there is a clear distinction between the two. He says 'an illusion is the misperception of a physical stimulus whose existence can be verified by independent observers.' This differs from an hallucination as in the latter the subject must perceive a stimulus that they believe really exists but 'independent observers must be unable to detect a stimulus of any sort that corresponds, however loosely, to that perceived by the subject.' He lists the twelve Marian apparitions that attracted the most attention in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and says that in most of the cases there were observers who saw nothing, indicating they were hallucinations.[93] However, he feels that as at Knock, Pontmain, France in 1871, and Zeitoun, Egypt in the late 1960s, some observers saw the stimulus for the apparition, but did not interpret it as an apparition, so these are likely to be illusions. At Knock and Zeitoun it was a light, at Pontmain three stars. He maintains, however, that just because somebody sees visions it does not mean they are mentally ill and details cases where people have seen illusions and hallucinations who have no other characteristics of mental illness. Clancy also argues that people who believe they have been abducted by aliens or who possess similar beliefs 'are no more likely than anyone else to suffer from psychological disorders. They may score high on

[93] Carroll, *Cult of the Virgin Mary*, pp 117-8.

measures of creativity, or proneness to fantasy, or intense visual imagery but so do lots of people who have never claimed contact with aliens.'[94]

In cases where the Virgin has been both seen and heard the number of visionaries is usually small. The three cases that Carroll classes as illusions all involve larger numbers of visionaries and at none of these did the Virgin speak. He states that if the Marian apparitions at Pontmain, Knock and Zeitoun 'really did involve the misperception of an ambiguous visual stimulus', then it is reasonable to expect a large number of witnesses, as there was something there to see. Moreover, it would have been visual with no aural element.[95] Conversely, if the event is an hallucination fewer people would experience it. Carroll suggests that auditory hallucinations are quite common and if somebody is manifesting visual hallucinations then they might also manifest auditory hallucinations.

Lennon said: 'To deny the possibility of ocular delusion in such circumstances, I consider, would be rash in the extreme.' He reproduced extracts from scientific writers attesting to the conditions necessary for an illusion or 'optical delusion'. He felt it significant that the apparition occurred at dusk, was white, and 'all surrounding objects were lost sight of.' He also stated that it was worth noting that the witnesses had seen statues closely resembling the figures in the apparition and 'the subject of apparitions, like those at Lourdes, had, evidently, been much talked about in the neighbourhood.' He also said that the breakage of religious statues which had been *en route* to the chapel at Knock must have attracted attention and caused regret 'especially to pious people like the family of the Beirnes.'[96] In

[94] Clancy, *Abducted*, p. 5.
[95] Carroll, *Cult of the Virgin Mary*, p. 120.
[96] Lennon to Cavanagh, 16 July 1880 (TDA, Gilmartin papers, B4/9-i/5).

essence, Lennon not only expressed scepticism about the reliability of the witnesses but believed in the possibility of ocular delusion. The portrayal of his evidence as supporting the veracity of the apparition by its devotees is misleading in the extreme.

## Images and Iconography

If a natural stimulus could be misinterpreted as an apparition it indicates there was a clear idea, in the minds of both witnesses and investigators, as to what the figures present should look like. While religious images had followed a certain form for centuries, religious iconography, like many things, became standardised and industrialised in the nineteenth century. According to Ann Wilson, 'mass-produced devotional imagery became a relatively inexpensive solution to the problem of furnishing empty shrines and altars in newly constructed or enlarged post-famine Irish Catholic churches.' Wilson states that as 3,000 Catholic Churches were built or rebuilt during the nineteenth century, by its end Irish Catholic religious practice was 'firmly centred within church buildings'. These all had to be furnished and decorated. As with the regularisation of practice most Irish churches 'conformed to a consistent and familiar pattern by the late nineteenth century.' The images used to furnish these churches were formulaic and mass produced by Irish and foreign ecclesiastical firms. Statues could be ordered from the catalogues of French and German companies and despite the quantity of works on offer, there was a narrow range of available images.[97] As a result, Irish Catholics would have had a limited number of stock images from which to draw their mental picture of the Blessed

[97] Ann Wilson, 'Arts and Crafts and Revivalism in Catholic Church Decoration: A Brief Duration', *Eire/Ireland,* Vol. 48, Nos. 3 & 4 (Winter 2013) pp 5, 8 & 11.

Virgin and other saints. The clergy would have been familiar with all of the standardised images, having seen the greatest number of them, and Cavanagh had recently ordered new statues from Lourdes, more than likely from a catalogue.

The identification of the figures of the apparition with statues is a constant theme in witness accounts. In her interview with Sexton, Mary Beirne claimed that she had walked with Mary McLoughlin because she was on her way to lock the chapel. She stated: 'When we got to the wall by the schoolhouse, I looked up to the chapel, and I saw the three statues.' When Sexton asked if the figures looked like statues she replied: 'Yes; they looked so like statues that I thought Father Cavanagh was after sending for them, and I wondered he never told us about them.'[98] Judy Campbell is one of the three witnesses for whom the original handwritten testimony survives. In both versions of her testimony she said she was at her house when Mary Beirne called at around eight o'clock. She said she ran to the church with Mary Beirne and saw the three figures as well as the altar, lamb and cross. In the handwritten testimony she describes the cross as 'reclining' on the lamb but the printed version states that it was 'at the back of the lamb.'[99] Her description of the figures is generally in keeping with the other witnesses and she refers to 'St John as we were led to call the third figure.'[100] However in the handwritten testimony she describes this figure as 'what I thought was the bishop.'[101]

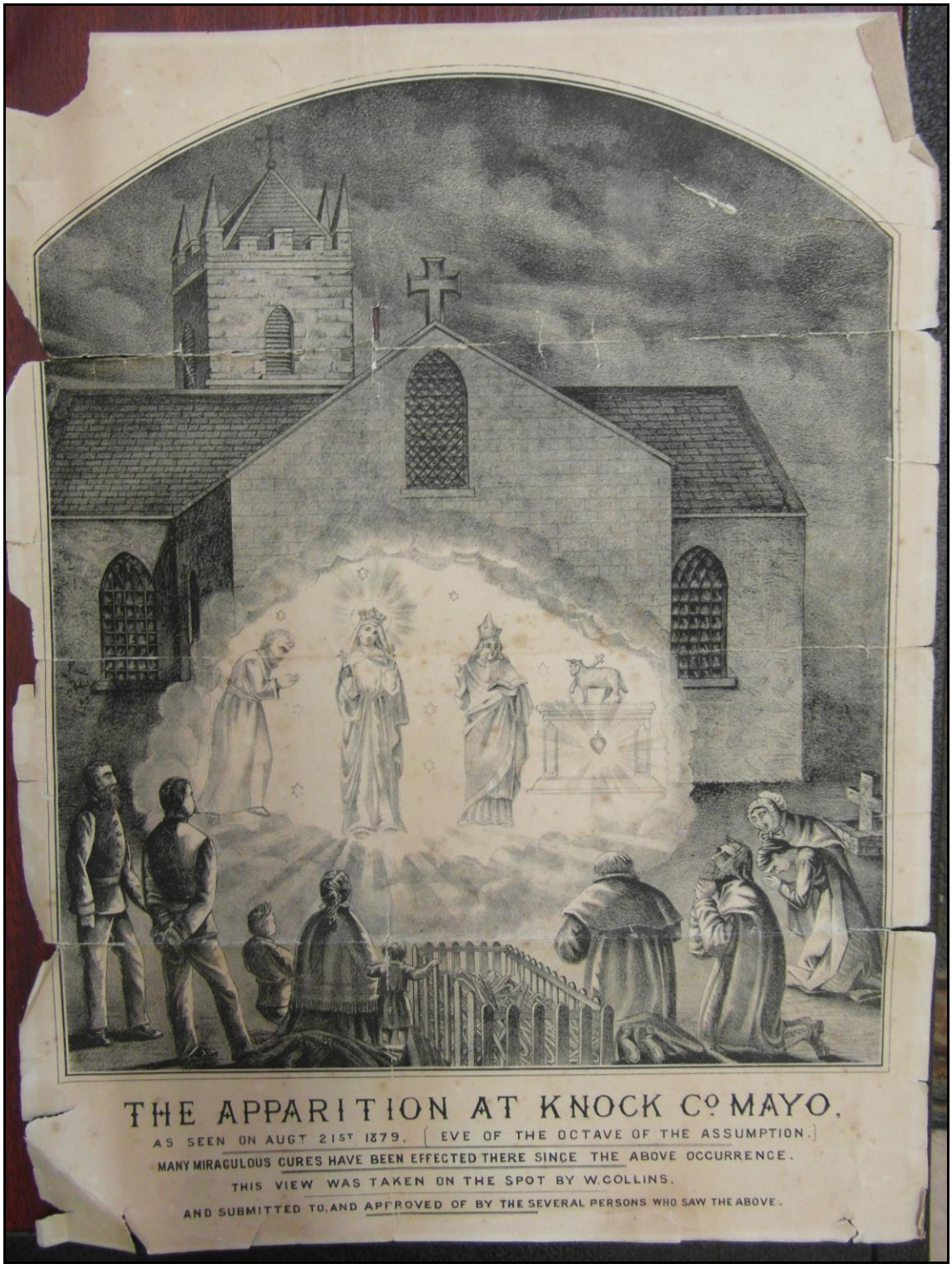
The most striking difference between the two accounts is that in the handwritten testimony she specifically refers to the figures of the apparition as

[98] Sexton, *Illustrated Record of the Apparitions,* p. 13.
[99] MacPhilpin, *Apparitions at Knock*, p. 44; Testimony of Judy Campbell (KSA, Cavanagh/Cusack papers, 112).
[100] MacPhilpin, *Apparitions at Knock*, p. 44.
[101] Testimony of Judy Campbell (KSA, Cavanagh/Cusack papers, 112).

'statues.'[102] The published account excises this. Her explanation for the identification of the figures is one that no other witnesses put forward: 'we believed they were St Joseph and. St John the Evangelist because some years ago statues of St Joseph and the Evangelist were in the chapel at Knock.'[103] Her handwritten account stated that St John wore a mitre, but in the printed version it was described as a small mitre, a clarification that brought unity to the testimony. Another difference was that in the original testimony she said there were twelve people present, but this is omitted from the printed account. In the printed testimony she said the place where the 'statues' appeared was dry but for the printed version the word used was 'figures.'[104] In the Sexton reproduction the word statues is used and it collates more closely with the handwritten testimony.

Nearly all the witnesses described the figure of St John the Evangelist as resembling a bishop wearing a mitre who held a gospel in one hand and had the other raised. Mary Beirne is generally accepted to be responsible for the identification of this figure. Her testimony claimed that the reason she identified the figure as such was that it resembled a statue she had seen in Lekanvey. However, she stated that while the figure in Lekanvey had a book in its left hand and its right hand raised, it did not wear a mitre. In speaking to the second commission in 1936 she stated that the reason for McLoughlin's visit to the Beirne house that evening was to see Margaret and Maggie Beirne who had just returned from Lekanvey.[105] This suggests a family connection with Lekanvey and it is possible that someone suggested to her that this was where she saw the statue. Indeed, as already mentioned, the handwritten

[102] Ibid.
[103] MacPhilpin, *Apparitions at Knock* p. 44.
[104] Ibid.; Testimony of Judy Campbell (KSA, Cavanagh/Cusack papers, 112).
[105] Mary O'Connell, née Beirne, testimony to second commission (TDA, Gilmartin papers, B4/9-i/5).




**A souvenir poster of the apparition c. 1880. (TDA, Gilmartin papers, B4/9-i/9).**

testimony of Maggie Beirne also stated she recognised the figure of St John from having seen a statue at Lekanvey, but this is in the form of a sentence at the bottom of the page, below her signature, and was omitted from printed versions of her testimony.[106]

Descriptions of St John the Evangelist are consistent among all the witnesses. However, we have no way of knowing what questions the priests asked or how they led the witnesses in giving their descriptions. The language of Mary Beirne's testimony suggests that it is not presented in her own words:

> It was this coincidence of figure and *pose* that made me surmise, for it is only an opinion, that the third figure was that of St John, the beloved disciple of our Lord. But I am not in any way sure what saint or character the figure represented. I said, as I now expressed, that it was St John the Evangelist, and all the others present said the same – said what I stated.

Like the other witnesses she described the altar as being under the window of the church and in an indication of the expectation of standardised imagery she said: 'The altar appeared to me to be like the altar in use in the Catholic Church – large and full sized.' St John was said to be on the 'Gospel side' of the altar and the lamb faced him. Mary Beirne also claimed that 'on the body of the Lamb, and around it, I saw golden stars, or small brilliant lights, glittering like jets or glass balls, reflecting the light of some luminous body.'[107] She stated she remained at the apparition site from 8.15 until 9.30 and did not mention going to get anybody else.

[106] MacPhilpin, *Knock*, p. 46. Maggie Beirne testimony (KSA, Cavanagh/Cusack papers, 112).
[107] MacPhilpin, *Apparitions at Knock*, pp 37-8.

Neither Hynes nor White are convinced that there was a statue of St John the Evangelist at Lekanvey and no evidence suggests there was one.[108] White contends that the template for the figure of John the Evangelist was a statue of a different John, John MacHale. A statue of MacHale, sculpted by James Foley, had been unveiled in Tuam for his Golden Jubilee in 1875. White states that the similarities go beyond both figures being bishops. He says that while the statue of MacHale did not have either a book or mitre, its hand was raised as if 'teaching'. He points to the length of MacHale's life and career and that for the vast majority of the witnesses MacHale would have been the only person they ever saw dressed as a bishop. He believes that the people at the gable may have decided the figure was John MacHale and that the impossibility of this made Cavanagh reluctant to go to the gable. He suggests 'perhaps Cavanagh affixed the appellation "saint" to the figure of the bishop, transferred the location of the statue from Tuam to Lekanvey, made handy because of the recent return of at least one seer from that location, and the statue of John of Tuam was quickly and permanently transformed into John the Evangelist.'[109] However, White then ventures to say that MacHale's denunciation of the Land War provoked considerable anxiety amongst the peasantry. Why they would then see him as a divine personage is not explained. Hynes finds the suggestion of the figure being based on the statue of John MacHale in Tuam as unconvincing as the idea that it is based on an alleged statue in Lekanvey.[110] White points out that there is no tradition in western Christianity of depicting St John the Evangelist as a bishop, but that in Ireland St Patrick appears in bishop's garb. White does not mention the fact that Lekanvey is at the foot of Croagh Patrick, a mountain associated with St Patrick and

[108] Hynes, *Knock*, p. 194.
[109] White, 'Pilgrimage and Popular Piety', pp 110-1.
[110] Hynes, *Knock*, p. 194.

a popular pilgrimage site, which increases the likelihood that there was a statue there that looked like a bishop, a statue of St Patrick. White says that, while the Nun of Kenmare tried to claim that some people had felt the figure was St Patrick, this interpretation never took root and he believes this 'bears testimony to a strong association in the mind of at least one seer that this figure dressed as a bishop was named John.'[111]

The chapel of Knock itself may have provided inspiration for images of saints. White points out that Knock chapel had a scene of the Holy Rood in the stain glass window, which depicts St John the Evangelist, Mary and Mary Magdalene at the scene of Jesus' crucifixion. There was, therefore, a template in people's minds for the association of St John the Evangelist with the Blessed Virgin. However, he says that 'none of the seers made any connection between the window and the identity of the bishop.' None of them made any connection between this figure and John MacHale, but that does not stop White arriving at that conclusion. In 1878 a violent storm tore slates off the roof of the chapel at Knock. It was said to have shattered windows and destroyed the altar candlesticks and the pictures of the Stations of the Cross. It also smashed the only statues in the church, which were of the Blessed Virgin, St Joseph and St Aloysius Gonzaga. Aloysius was Cavanagh's middle name and it has been claimed that he had a particular devotion to this saint.[112] St Aloysius, like St John, is generally portrayed as being young. He is never portrayed as wearing a mitre, but usually as wearing a cassock and surplice. He is most often depicted holding a crucifix but is occasionally portrayed holding a gospel. When the mitre is excluded it is not beyond the realm of possibility that the statue of

[111] White, 'Pilgrimage and Popular Piety', pp 107-8.
[112] Ibid., pp 109-10.

Aloysius in Knock chapel resembled a bishop holding a bible, but that is by no means certain. It is possible, therefore, that the three statues that had been in Knock chapel provided the template for the apparition. Judith Campbell claimed that statues of St John and St Joseph had stood in the chapel at Knock, but these were in fact of St Joseph and St Aloysius. However, similarities between depictions of St Aloysius and St John mean it is possible that the statue of Aloysius resembled the image of John in the stained glass window. The people of Knock may not have realised this statue was of Aloysius and believed it was St John the Evangelist.

However, the exact nature of the statues that had been in the church is unknown, so it is impossible to say whether the three figures at the gable resembled them. Following the destruction of these statues in 1878 two statues ordered to replace them broke in transit and Cavanagh eventually ordered two statues 'from Lourdes'. Donnelly states that Cavanagh had a particular devotion to Our Lady of Lourdes and a clerical friend of his, the Augustinian priest Fr James Anderson, bought for the church a statue of 'our Blessed Lady of Lourdes', which stood to the left of the altar.[113] Apparently many alleged visions occurred around this statue.[114] Many of the witnesses at Knock described Mary as wearing a crown and, speaking to Sexton, Mary Beirne described it as a beautiful golden crown.[115] Our Lady of Lourdes is not generally portrayed wearing a crown, but it is not unknown. However, depictions of Mary with a crown, representing her role as either Queen of Heaven or her lineage from the house of David extend back centuries. The witnesses described St Joseph as having grey whiskers, although the figures were said to be white. St Joseph is often portrayed as elderly, with grey hair and a grey beard. However, he is

[113] Sexton, *Illustrated Record of the Apparitions,* p. 27.
[114] Donnelly, 'Marian Shrine', p. 61.
[115] Sexton, *Illustrated Record of the Apparitions,* p. 13.

also often portrayed as youthful and holding the infant Jesus. While it is not possible to say what form the statue in Knock chapel took, that the visionaries readily identified the elderly saint as St Joseph indicates it may have been the aged version of St Joseph.

When Catherine Labouré, a twenty-four-year-old novitiate nun of the order of the Sisters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul at 140 rue de Bac, Paris, saw apparitions of the Virgin Mary in 1830, she claimed the Virgin showed her an image to be reproduced on a medal. Accounts of this apparition state that she told no one of it apart from her confessor Fr Aladel. At first he did not believe her, but eventually he became convinced and petitioned the Archbishop of Paris to allow the minting of the medal. The medal, however, did not depict the Blessed Virgin as Labouré had described her, holding out a golden ball surmounted with a small cross, which represented the world, but rather 'with outstretched hands pointing downward that is traditionally associated with Mary's Immaculate Conception.' Michael Carroll states that 'literally hundreds of millions' of these medals have been produced and that 'its widespread popularity undoubtedly did pave the way for the proclamation of the belief in the Immaculate Conception as Dogma in 1854.' The medal now commonly known as a miraculous medal was originally titled the 'Medal of the Immaculate Conception.'[116] The Church in this instance was willing to intervene and produced standardised images of the Blessed Virgin, rather than depicting what the visionary reported, so alterations of the testimony of visionaries are certainly not without precedent. This image then proved an inspiration for further apparitions and provided the template for the Blessed Virgin as described by Bernadette Soubirous at Lourdes in 1858. The identity of Catherine Labouré as the person who had seen the apparition

[116] Carroll, *Cult of the Virgin Mary,* p. 168.

was not revealed until just before her death in 1876 and this fact provides another precedent for Knock. While the witnesses at Knock had originally claimed Mary's hands were raised, when Mary O'Connell née Beirne was interviewed in 1936 for the second commission, she had changed her mind about the positioning of the hands and now stated that they were in position similar to the image of the Immaculate Conception.[117] That she changed her mind indicates that the memories of the witnesses were open to interference, not just at the time but in the years that followed and devotional imagery contributed to this interference.

While there were elements the Knock apparition shared with other apparitions there were also notable differences. The witnesses at Knock claimed the apparition hovered between one and two feet above the ground and out from the chapel wall. Carroll feels this is significant as when the Blessed Virgin is seen up close she is most frequently seen resting on something, such as a chair or bush. The only time she is not resting on something is when she is seen at a distance. Carroll states that Knock is the only incident he knows of where she was seen close up and hovering. He says, however, that the only time she is depicted in iconographic imagery suspended above the ground is in images of her Assumption into heaven. While the Assumption only became dogma in 1950, it is one of the oldest Marian feasts and has been depicted numerous times. Likewise Carroll claims that the pretext for depicting Mary with St John the Evangelist was in depictions of the Assumption, as Jesus was said to have entrusted her care to the disciple he loved, John. The Feast of the Assumption had been celebrated six days previously, on 15 August, and as the *Apparitions at Knock* points out, the Apparition took place on the eve of the octave of the Assumption. Some religious feasts are celebrated for eight

[117] Mary O'Connell, née Beirne, testimony to second commission (TDA, Gilmartin papers, B4/9-i/5).

days, the most important days being the first and the last. The only Marian feasts with octaves are the Assumption and the Immaculate Conception and the former was considered the most important in the nineteenth century.[118] Carroll feels that as Dominick was sacristan, and his sister Mary may have frequently substituted for him, they may have been involved in setting up the church for the various celebrations that occurred for the Assumption. He says that an awareness of the feast of the Assumption combined with a supposed threat of eviction proved the stimulus for the apparition, just as a fear of the advancing Prussian forces had proved a stimulus for the apparition at Pontmain in 1871.

Donnelly states that in claiming there existed a local fear of evictions Carroll relies on the testimony of Archbishop John J. Lynch of Toronto, who saw evicted families on his way from Claremorris to Knock in 1882. He therefore interpreted the apparition as an intercession on behalf of the tenants. Donnelly points out that it is unclear whether evictions took place as early as 1879 or that the seers at Knock felt threatened with eviction. The location of these families, between Claremorris and Knock, and the year, 1882, demonstrates that they were, more than likely, the former tenants of the Bourke estate, whose plight led Ulick Bourke to write *A Plea for the Evicted Tenants of Mayo.* The people at Knock were tenants on the Dillon estate and there is no record of threatened evictions.

The visionaries at Knock had a stock of images from earlier apparitions, miraculous medals, and Catholic iconography, in particular the statues at Knock chapel, from which to construct their apparition. The people most familiar with all the different depictions of the Blessed Virgin were the priests and it is likely that

[118] Carroll, *Cult of the Virgin Mary,* pp 208-9.

they shaped many of the religiously orthodox elements of the apparition scene. When a subject is asked to imagine an event in detail, they are subsequently more likely to believe that the events have happened.[119] It is perhaps no coincidence that only Patrick Hill claimed to have seen angels. Of all the depictions of the Assumption, the most common motif is of Mary being raised by angels and Bourke may have played the greatest role in shaping this element of the scene.

## Mary Beirne and Minority Influence

It has already been demonstrated that Mary Beirne played a significant role in identifying the bishop figure as St John the Evangelist, but her influence extended beyond this. As the person who first identified the apparition, and alerted the other witnesses to it, she played a key role in shaping accounts. Although Mary McLoughlin claimed to be the first to see the apparition, when she passed the chapel on her way to the Beirne house, sometime after 7pm, she walked by and spent between a quarter and half an hour with the Beirnes without mentioning what she had seen. She later claimed she had mistaken the figures, bathed in light, for statues. On her return Mary Beirne accompanied her and it was she who drew McLoughlin's attention to the apparition, saying: 'Look at the beautiful figures.' Mary Beirne not only informed McLoughlin of the apparition, but also fetched the remainder of her family. It seems that when Mary arrived at the house she found Dominick and her niece Catherine Murray, but Margaret and Maggie were out milking the cows, and Catherine Murray returned to get them.[120] She also called to the Campbell household

[119] Clancy, *Abducted*, p. 16.
[120] MacPhilpin, *Apparitions at Knock*, pp 34-5.

from where Judy Campbell and Bridget Trench came. McLoughlin claimed that at this time she remained where she was, outside the ditch to the south of the chapel, thirty yards from the apparition and that she leaned on the wall to observe it. She says that she remained for fifteen minutes after these others arrived and instructed Mary Beirne to go for her uncle, Bryan Beirne, his wife, and any neighbours she saw. We can deduce that Dominick Beirne called to this house as Daniel Campbell stated that Patrick Hill's mother and Bryan Beirne's wife were sisters.[121] Neither Bryan Beirne nor his wife went to the chapel, although his son, the elder Dominick Beirne did, along with Hill, John Curry and John Durkan.

All of the witnesses who arrived at the chapel after Mary Beirne and Mary McLoughlin had been summoned there, directly or indirectly by Mary Beirne and had been told what to expect beforehand. Therefore, apart from Patrick Walsh who claimed to have only seen lights and Mrs Hugh Flatley who may never have been there, every witness was told to look at an apparition of the Blessed Virgin and two saints. Most of the witnesses refer to this point, such as when the senior Dominick Beirne described seeing the three figures 'just as the other persons had told me before I came.' This indicates the expectations he had before even arriving at the scene. Maggie Beirne also made it clear that she arrived at the Church with an expectation and states she was called out to see the 'Vision of the Blessed Virgin, and of the saints.'[122] The use of the term vision is common throughout the witness testimony and whether this implies the witnesses were not claiming to see the Blessed Virgin, Joseph, and John the Evangelist themselves, but rather figures representing them is hard to deduce. Moreover, while there they discussed what they

[121] Diary of Daniel Campbell, Knock Museum.
[122] MacPhilpin, *Apparitions at Knock,* pp 39 & 46.

saw and they could have gravitated towards a consensus. Patrick Hill told Sexton that while there the witnesses spoke about 'nothing only what we saw.'[123]

Devotees of Knock have long stressed that the number of witnesses is evidence that an apparition did occur. However, one of the most studied phenomena in social psychology is that of group conformity. Numerous experiments have shown that in a group situation the opinions of individuals can be influenced to match those of others, born of the desire to conform to a social norm. Belief in an apparition may not seem like a norm, but if the person suggesting the event was a person of status within the group they have the potential to influence others. The core of the witnesses consisted of members of two households of the same extended family. One other cousin of this family, Patrick Beirne, was also present. Of the six unrelated witnesses one, Patrick Walsh, was nowhere near the church and saw only a light and one, Mrs Hugh Flatley, may have simply fabricated her story. Her evidence stated that she passed by the Church at around 8 o'clock and saw the three figures standing at the southern gable. She claimed: 'I thought that the parish priest had been ornamenting the church and got some beautiful likenesses removed outside.'[124] She did not mention seeing the other witnesses or lights, nor did anybody else mention seeing her. Margaret Beirne and her children form the core of the group of witnesses and of these Mary Beirne played the greatest role in influencing the group's perception of the event at the church gable.

Thomas Sexton said of the Beirne family: 'Everything I saw of them— their appearance, their home, their manners— and everything I heard of them from neighbours who have known them all their lives, led me to judge of them as honest,

[123] Sexton, *Illustrated Record of the Apparitions at Knock,* p. 5.
[124] MacPhilpin, *Apparitions at Knock*, p. 41.

industrious, and respectable people, whose word upon any matter to which they solemnly pledge it ought to be treated with attention and respect.' This is an oft repeated claim usually taken as an indication of their reliability, but it also points to their ability to influence others. The siblings Mary and Dominick Beirne formed the nucleus of the Beirne household. Their father had passed away, their mother was quite elderly and their sister infirm. Sexton interviewed the Beirnes in their home and described a scene where a large number of visitors were entertained and refreshments were served. In describing the kitchen, he said: 'the inside of the dwelling was comfortable and neat in its appearance. The "dresser" — familiar to all who visit Irish rural homesteads — stood laden with its rows of plates and dishes. The furniture of the apartment was suitably substantial'. When Sexton interviewed Mary Beirne he did so in the parlour, and the fact of having a second room for a communal space indicates that the Beirnes were reasonably comfortable. He described this room as 'betokening, not alone neatness, but good taste.'[125] He said of Mary Beirne, 'She is tall—very tall for a woman—erect in carriage, thin, black-haired, has an oval face, with a tint of brown approaching almost to olive; regular features, and eyes, not very large, but dark and brilliant.' She looked the interviewer straight in the eye and was quick to answer questions and he portrayed her as confident and direct. However, psychologists have concluded that there is no relationship between confidence and accuracy.[126] The relative respectability of the family, and Mary's confident bearing and seeming intelligence were crucial in her ability to influence the other witnesses. Fr Francis Lennon interviewed Mary and Dominick and said they were 'both of full age and highly intelligent'.[127] When

[125] Sexton, *Illustrated Record of the Apparitions,* pp 12-4.
[126] Brainerd and Reyna, *False Memory,* p. 11.
[127] Lennon to Cavanagh, 16 July 1880 (TDA, Gilmartin papers, B4/9-i/5).

Sexton asked if she had seen any other sights since, Mary Beirne said: 'Yes, three or four times since, at night. I saw lights, like stars, coming out through the gable in a blaze, and then disappearing, and I saw a beautiful light like a moon shining, although the night was dark.'[128] However, she never mentioned these incidents again, indicating that while she was willing to embellish her accounts she had limits.

Sexton described Dominick Beirne as 'a tall well-knit young fellow, erect and lively, with a small and shapely head, an aquiline nose, a keen dark eye, and clear cut, handsome features.'[129] He was respectably dressed and ostensibly he acted as assistant to Archdeacon Cavanagh. In Sexton's reproduction of the testimony it is possible to distinguish between witnesses who were literate and those who were not, as he indicates whether they signed their name or made an X. Dominick Beirne was literate, as were his sisters. In his testimony he made two things clear: firstly, that like all the other witnesses he arrived at the church with expectations of an apparition, as he had been told: 'Come, Dominick and see the image of the Blessed Virgin as she has appeared to us down at the chapel', before he elicited even greater detail from his sister. He also made it plain in his testimony that he had been present for Mary Beirne's interview when he described the scene as being 'as she has already described it for your reverence in her testimony.' He demonstrated the statuesque appearance of the images: 'They were like figures inasmuch as they didn't speak.' Dominick Beirne claimed that the apparition moved him to tears and he remained watching it for an hour. He then went to the house of Mrs Campbell, 'who was in a dying state.'[130] He claimed that when he returned the apparition had

[128] Sexton, *Illustrated Record of the Apparitions,* p. 13.
[129] Ibid., p. 9.
[130] MacPhilpin, *Apparitions at Knock,* pp 40-1.

disappeared, but he does not say what time this was. In fact, no witness claimed to remain to the end of the apparition.

In the Sexton's version of the testimony, Margaret Beirne, who was said to be 68 years of age, made an X to sign her name, so we can deduce she was illiterate. Sexton described her as 'well on in years' and 'bent and wasted'. He did say that 'she impressed me as a person of considerable intelligence, and her readiness to answer was quite evident.' However, he did not recount her testimony as 'Mrs Byrne then gave an account which was practically a repetition of that already supplied above.' Sexton was certainly not as taken with Maggie as he was with her sister. He said of her: 'She was wrapped in a heavy shawl, and appeared to be in very delicate health. She is tall, like her elder sister, but otherwise there is slight resemblance between them; for whilst Mary is dark eyed, brown-complexioned, and quick of thought and speech, Margaret is very pale, with eyes of a bluish tint; she takes some time to reflect, and her manner of speech is slow, but this heaviness no doubt springs from the languor induced by long indisposition.'[131] However, Maggie Beirne may have seemed less confident in what she said because she was less convinced of what she had seen.

Three of the witnesses were of a low social status: the casual labourer, John Durkan; the old woman who depended on her neighbours for charity, Bridget Trench; and the priest's housekeeper, Mary McLoughlin, who had a reputation for being an alcoholic. People who are likely to conform to group expectations tend to have low self-esteem, a high need for social support or approval, a low IQ, and are anxious and insecure.[132] They can be influenced by others because they are

[131] Sexton, *Illustrated Record of the Apparitions,* p. 14.
[132] Wendy Stainton Rogers, *Social Psychology: Experimental and Critical Approaches* (Philadelphia,

dependent on them for information or for reasons of social approval and acceptance.[133] John Durkan, who accompanied Patrick Hill, Dominick Beirne senior and John Curry, did not have his testimony recorded in the pamphlet as 'his testimony is the same as that given by each of the Beirnes.'[134] The Sexton pamphlet did not even mention him. John Curry described John Durkan in later years as a 'servant-man' who had worked with his uncle, Dominick Beirne.[135] As a casual labourer his position would have been one of the most precarious in the community. That his testimony was not thought worthy of publication is a stark contrast to many other apparitions where the poverty of the witnesses is used as proof of their piety.

75 year-old Bridget Trench spoke only Irish. Fr Corbett, of Claremorris, translated her testimony into English as she spoke. Trench was in the house of Mrs Campbell when Mary Beirne came and told them about the apparition. She claimed that on arriving at the chapel she gave thanks to God and attempted to kiss the feet of the Virgin but 'felt nothing in the embrace but the wall' and wondered why she could not feel the figures she had so clearly seen. The figures were described as 'statue-like.' Like many other witnesses Trench described seeing the Virgin's feet and claimed to have kissed them three times, but did not say how she managed to do this. Her reason for believing the bishop figure to be St John was that she 'heard those around me say that the image was St John.' Trench claimed that she remained there an hour and spent the whole time reciting the rosary 'giving thanks to God and repeating my prayers.'[136] The identification of Bridget Trench as an 'old woman' rather than referring to her by name frequently occurs in the testimony of witnesses

2003), p. 274; Michael Hogg and Graham M. Vaughan, *Social Psychology* (New York, 2002) p. 250.

[133] Hogg and Vaughan, *Social Psychology*, p. 254.
[134] MacPhilpin, *Apparitions at Knock*, p. 46.
[135] John Curry testimony to second commission, (TDA, Gilmartin papers, B4/9-i/5).
[136] MacPhilpin, *Apparitions at Knock*, pp 42-3.

and Mary Beirne repeated it when interviewed by the second commission in 1936.[137] This, as well as her lack of a knowledge of English, indicates a low social standing. Rev. Francis Lennon, who interviewed her, stated that 'the old woman who appears to depend on the charity of her neighbours for the means of living, can hardly be described as unprejudiced.'[138] Beyond a desire for acceptance, Durkan and Trench probably also would not have wanted to jeopardise their chance of an income from the Beirne family by contradicting them.

The testimony as reproduced in Sexton's work indicates that Mary McLoughlin made a mark rather than signing her name and that she therefore may have been illiterate. In addition, according to the Sexton account, her testimony was signed as witnessed by Bourke and Waldron, which may or may not indicate that Cavanagh removed himself from the process of interviewing his housekeeper. Although Sexton interviewed McLoughlin he did not reproduce her testimony as he said it matched that of the other witnesses. A claim that appeared frequently and that Donnelly felt was oft-repeated because it was 'amusing' was that Mcloughlin had a drink problem.[139] When in 1936 the second commission interviewed Mary Beirne, now 86 and known by her married name, Mary O'Connell, she was asked whether Mary McLoughlin drank. She stated that McLoughlin was as good a housekeeper as a priest could have but for 'one little fault.' Apparently when she had an injured foot the doctor had 'allowed her a little drop of drink so she got into the habit for a short time of taking more than enough.'[140] However, Mary O'Connell was confident that

[137] Mary O'Connell, née Beirne, testimony to second commission (TDA, Gilmartin papers, B4/9-i/5).
[138] Lennon to Cavanagh, 16 July 1880, (TDA, Gilmartin papers, B4/9-i/5).
[139] Donnelly, 'Marian Shrine', p. 56.
[140] Mary O'Connell, née Beirne, testimony to second commission (TDA, Gilmartin papers, B4/9-i/5).

on the night in question McLoughlin was sober and Patrick Beirne corroborated this fact.[141]

Stories of McLoughlin's alcoholism persisted and in 1938 Fr C.W. Corbett, the parish priest of Mallow, Co. Cork, wrote to the *Irish Times* to say that not only had there been little excitement in Maynooth, where he was a student at the time of the apparition, but they had received a lecture on Church discipline and the need for caution in such matters. Corbett stated that by the time of his ordination in 1881 the apparition had been forgotten, but that in 1886 he met an 'able parish priest' who had made private inquiry and come to the conclusion that, a person whose name was redacted from the newspaper, 'used to indulge in strong drink and saw visions – as many in that state have done and will do.' Corbett stated that in 1893 or 1894 he had spent his holidays in the West of Ireland where the event had more or less been forgotten and clergy to whom he spoke 'expressed utter unbelief in it.'[142] Moreover, he stated that he had a couple of years previously written with this information to the Archbishop of Tuam, who thanked him and said he would give the information to the commission. It is possible that this is how the witnesses came to be questioned on the matter. That McLoughlin had a reputation as an alcoholic at the very least raises questions about her status in the group. However, if she had been drinking on the night it also raises questions about the reliability of her testimony. Cavanagh told Sexton he was 'a strict teetotaller, and quite averse, as you may guess, to any facilities being afforded for indulgence in intoxicating liquors.'[143] Presumably, McLoughlin had to do her drinking outside the house and, despite what the witnesses claimed in 1936, one of the reasons she left Cavanagh's house that evening may

[141] Patrick Beirne testimony to second commission (TDA, Gilmartin papers, B4/9-i/5).
[142] C.W. Corbett to *Irish Times*, 23 July 1938 (TDA, Gilmartin papers, B4/9-i/9).
[143] Sexton, *Illustrated Record of Apparitions,* p. 27.

have been to drink. If she had been drinking it helps to explain why Cavanagh did not take her accounts of the apparition seriously when she returned home.

The other person present who was not a member of the Beirne family was Judith Campbell, a friend of the family and a neighbour. In fact, the Beirnes went to call on her dying mother when they left the church. Of the nine members of the extended Beirne family who were present, Bourke extensively coached Patrick Hill and while his testimony is detailed, Lennon did not regard him as a credible witness. Two others, John Curry and Catherine Murray, were young children and, presumably, had lively imaginations and were open to suggestion. Patrick Beirne gave little testimony at the time, but did say he remained only fifteen minutes, a point he retracted in 1936.[144] That Mary and Dominick Beirne brought nearly all the other witnesses to the church and told them in advance what to expect, demonstrates that they were in a position to influence the group prior to the alleged apparition, during it through the forging of a group consensus, and for weeks after.

Group conformity is not necessarily about getting a minority to conform to the opinions of a majority and there is 'evidence for minority influence, where a small minority is able to sway the judgements of the majority.' This occurs when 'the majority lack confidence in their own judgement, and so conflicting information from the minority can have a relatively greater impact; and when the majority is less powerful and so its normative influence is reduced.' For a minority influence to work it must be strong, persuasive, and, above all, consistent. If the minority repeatedly present the same message it can disrupt the majority norm and raise doubts about it, 'drawing attention to a sustained, clear and coherent alternative viewpoint.'[145] The

[144] Patrick Beirne testimony to second commission (TDA, Gilmartin papers, B4/9-i/5).
[145] Stainton Rogers, *Social Psychology,* pp 275-8.

influence of the minority at Knock did not just happen at the apparition site. After all, many of the witnesses left after a short time, so we can be reasonably certain they were unconvinced of the divine nature of the spectacle they saw. However, they may not have had an alternative explanation for the strange lights and in the following weeks they received consistent post-event information from their social group on the nature of the apparition. This influenced their interpretation of what they had seen and reshaped their very memories of the event. Moreover, as word of the apparition spread through the locality we can only assume that those who had witnessed it, but were unconvinced, found they became more certain. If, as seems to be the case, the witnesses were interviewed in the presence of each other, they would have heard the other's testimony and been influenced by it. They would not have liked to contradict members of their family, or people they depended on financially, in front of priests. The story would therefore have been relatively coherent by the time they were interviewed and the interview made it orthodox.

## Conclusion

By the time the commission of investigation interviewed the witnesses the story of the apparition was reasonably coherent. However, discrepancies remained. The way in which the commission suggested a narrative, rather than examining the truth of events, enabled the story to coalesce. The witnesses were interviewed in each other's presence and were unlikely to contradict each other. Their parish priests did the interviewing and the witnesses were likely to give a version of events that pleased the clergy and unlikely to counter their suggestions. Even if the social power of the clergy was being challenged, their religious power held considerable weight.

Moreover, the role Dominick Beirne and his sisters played in assisting the priest shows their close connection to Cavanagh. Likewise, Patrick Hill was connected to Bourke. Before his interview with the commission, Bourke had begun to shape Hill's account of events. Bourke had worked to shape the Irish language, history, national identity, the outcomes of elections, and the dynamics of the Land War. It is not all that surprising he would work to shape accounts of the Knock apparition. The clergy had been under sustained attack from the leaders of the land agitation since April and, while Bourke had worked to ensure the clergy had a place in the movement, they were still open to challenge. Whether Bourke genuinely believed in the Knock apparition or cynically manipulated it is hard to say. However, despite his involvement in the *Tuam News* he did not do anything to promote the apparition until January 1880. When he did, it was because accounts were taking a shape that he did not control. His work in publicising the apparition was a further intervention to ensure that the actions of the masses did not step outside the approved parameters of the Church.

# Chapter 6: 'A Remedy from a Higher Power' – The Story Spreads

Given Bourke's connection to the newspaper and role in the commission of investigation it is unsurprising that the *Tuam News* was the first newspaper to report on the Knock apparition. However, this did not occur until 9 January 1880, a full three months after the commission sat. The publication of the *Apparitions at Knock* at the end of March supplemented reports in the *Tuam News*. This pamphlet stated that 'these points have been spoken of and canvassed in conversation amongst laity, and amongst religious for the past six months. It was only when the matter was described in a former issue of the Tuam News that the faithful began to attach any degree of credibility to the facts before that time incorrectly narrated.'[1] This is a crucial point. The *Tuam News* did not simply publicise the apparition; it worked to displace unorthodox accounts shaped by folklore and folk religious practice. Sexton claimed that he had first heard reports of the apparition several months before he reported on them, but initially he 'was asked to regard the information as private.' He claimed that 'no decision had yet been come to concerning them; and that in this stage of the affair the desire of the clergy was that no widespread publicity should be given to the reported occurrences.'[2] This indicates that Bourke may have decided when and how to make the apparition known.

The diary of Daniel Campbell highlighted the folk aspects of religious devotion in Knock prior to the Famine. Although his memories of Knock precede the devotional revolution, they give some insight into local religious practice. As well as

[1] MacPhilpin, *Apparitions at Knock*, p. 10.
[2] Sexton, *Illustrated Record of the Apparitions,* p. 4.

detailing fairy lore he relayed several anecdotes concerning the supposed supernatural powers of priests and their ability to influence events with prayer, as well as curses. Folk practices and religion intertwine constantly in Campbell's narrative and he told of measures such as chain prayers used to ward off cholera. Lennon told Cavanagh that

> although unable for the reasons assigned, to admit supernatural agency in the alleged apparitions, the visit to Knock has made a deep impression on me. No one can witness the crowds of afflicted sufferers who throng the roads heading to your chapel to hear the supplicant petitions uttered aloud within its walls without feeling conscious of his own ingratitude, and admiring the lively faith which, when human aid has failed, seeks a remedy from a higher power.[3]

While the growth of pilgrimage had much to do with press reports it had begun organically before printed reports surfaced. Between August 1879 and January 1880 'reports of the apparitions at Knock… spread amongst the people, and the little parish church has become a place of pilgrimage to thousands.'[4] This happened outside the control of the clergy. By taking a proactive role in disseminating the narrative of the apparition, Bourke staged an intervention that would ensure accounts of the apparition remained as orthodox as possible.

Sexton drew attention to the large number of pilgrims attending Knock by January 1880 and said 'the fame of the place is growing, I may say, hourly. Accounts of the apparitions derived from the statements of eye-witnesses have been given by some of the Western newspapers, and out of the stage of privacy the affair has

[3] Lennon to Cavanagh, 16 July 1880, (TDA, Gilmartin papers, B4/9-i/5).
[4] Sexton, *Illustrated Record of the Apparitions,* p. 4.

passed altogether.'[5] Bourke may have waited for ecclesiastical approval before making the apparition more widely known, but in the absence of approval and the growth of rumours and pilgrimage he intervened to transmit the 'official' account. His efforts at the promotion of the apparition also coincided with the foundation of the Gaelic Union, Bourke may have believed the revival could be spiritual as well as cultural.

Divided opinions on the veracity of the apparition were not simply between Catholic and non-Catholic or religious and non-religious. The first page of *The Apparitions at Knock* stated that 'many religious-minded persons doubt the reality of this, let us suppose, supernatural manifestation', before going on to criticise those who 'make science the only criterion of truth.'[6] This statement is reminiscent of Bourke's criticism of materialists in the *Aryan Origins* or his claim in the *Bull Ineffabilis* that 'truth, though revealed, is not on that account always believed.'[7] While admitting that some claimed that the apparition was the result of a natural event or deception, the pamphlet professed: 'Whatever the views may be of those who read these pages they in no way concern the editor of this pamphlet, which is simply a reproduction, in book form of the facts that he has already published.' While it was stated that, 'it is well to avoid the expression of any personal opinions' and 'the mere narration of the facts is quite sufficient', the pamphlet attempted to dispel arguments against the authenticity of the apparition and it is anything but unbiased.[8]

[5] Ibid.
[6] MacPhilpin, *Apparitions at Knock,* p. 1.
[7] Bourke, *Aryan Origins*, p. 13; *Bull Ineffabilis,* p. vii.
[8] MacPhilpin, *Apparitions at Knock,* pp 2-3.

According to Donnelly, the international fame Knock received as an Irish Lourdes came about 'through skilful promotion of both the apparitions and hundreds of reported cures'. He believes that 'Knock was extraordinarily fortunate in having well-placed, dedicated and enthusiastic promoters' and he gives particular credit to MacPhilpin and T.D. Sullivan. Sullivan and his brother A.M. were on close terms with MacHale and Donnelly claims his 'religio-political ideology had much in common with theirs.' The *Nation* serialised a diary of cures kept by Cavanagh and by early October 1880 had published a record of 637 cures along with other letters claiming cures. Donnelly credits Cavanagh's diary of cures and its publication as central to the development of the reputation of Knock. In addition, the *Nation* printed records of pilgrimages and other apparitions and extensively covered the Marpingen apparitions. Donnelly's article deals remarkably little with Bourke, but he says: 'It was Canon Bourke who in numerous ways facilitated T.D. Sullivan's journalistic research on the Knock phenomenon. A believer himself, Bourke helped to turn Sullivan into a convinced adherent.'[9] However, he makes no mention of Bourke's role on the investigating commission.

Ulick Bourke had connections to the *Nation*, as did John MacHale, but there is no evidence that MacHale had any involvement in publicising the event. Therefore, the connection to the *Nation* must have been Bourke. The role he played in liaising with the media generally supports this. Sexton claimed that on arriving in Claremorris his 'first call was on the worthy parish priest, the Very Rev. Ulick Canon Bourke, the well-known Irish scholar and litterateur, who was one of the clergymen appointed by his Grace of Tuam to take down the depositions of witnesses to the apparitions, and generally to investigate the evidence relating

[9] Donnelly, 'Marian Shrine at Knock', pp 55, 67-70 & 73.

thereto.' Bourke summoned Patrick Hill to be interviewed by Sexton, as he later did for Joseph Bennett of the *Daily Telegraph*. On the following day, Bourke accompanied Sexton to Knock to obtain for him 'every facility' for making inquiries.[10] He provided the same service to Bennett, introducing him to the Claremorris witnesses and accompanying him to Knock where he met Fr Cavanagh and other witnesses.[11] As well as having accounts published in the *Tuam News* and liaising with reporters, Bourke worked to get international attention for Knock and he wrote to the American Catholic publication *Ave Maria* with accounts of the apparition.[12] Bourke and Cavanagh's roles in promoting the apparition were, strictly speaking, in violation of the procedures laid down by the Council of Trent. According to Blackbourn, 'Until the enquiry had been concluded and a formal judgement reached, the clergy was expected to maintain a neutral position; any support for the apparitions by individual priests or members of the laity had a purely private unofficial status.'[13] This would preserve the integrity of the church, but Blackbourn maintains that matters were not usually so straightforward in practice. Popular support for the apparitions could sway local clergy, who did not want to be cut off from their parishioners.

By early January 1880 Knock had already attracted pilgrims, but the emergence of print accounts led to a mushrooming of numbers. Correspondents recounted the large numbers of people on the roads going to and from the chapel. The first report to appear in the *Nation* was responsible for a large increase in the number of pilgrims and when Sexton returned for his second visit, at the start of

[10] Sexton, *Illustrated Record of the Apparitions*, pp 4-5.
[11] MacPhilpin, *Apparitions at Knock*, pp 54-63.
[12] Copy of report from *Ave Maria,* January 1880. (KSA, Coyne Papers, 441).
[13] Blackbourn, *Marpingen*, p. 305.

February, the ‘space that had been five months ago—at the time of the first apparition— occupied by a waving meadow, and that up to a few days since had been dry and smooth and grassy, was now covered with a paste of mud to the depth of two or three inches.’ He said as a result of thousands of feet walking over the ground every blade of grass had disappeared and ‘in place of a dry and smooth expanse there was left a place torn up as if a pitched battle bad been fought upon the scene.’ He described seeing poor peasants as well as the better off classes there and the sick as well as the healthy. In addition, the number of sticks and crutches left behind by those hoping for a cure had quadrupled since the previous week. While the apparition had grown in fame through word of mouth, its appearance in the national press seems to have resulted in exponential growth. After describing the groups and individuals engaged in worship, Sexton said: ‘The spirit of devotion was intense and all-pervading, I never, in all my life, beheld a spectacle so thrilling, by reason of the intensity of its religious fervour and the majesty of its spiritual exaltation. I do not anticipate that I ever shall see the like of it again.’[14] Bourke understood the power of the printed word, and, by publishing accounts in the *Tuam News*, writing to other periodicals, and escorting journalists to Knock and furnishing them with ‘official’ accounts, he helped take the event out of the realm of local lore and gave it the appearance, nationally and internationally, of a bona fide and orthodox Marian apparition.

[14] Sexton, *Illustrated Record of the Apparitions,* p. 9.

## Why Mary Visited

The *Apparitions at Knock* established several motifs that became central to the narrative of Knock. One of these was Cavanagh's reputation for piety. The author(s) stated: 'The pastor of Knock and Aughamór is zealous, devoted to his sacred calling, and humble client of Mary, the Mother of God: and so the people, at least many of them, are simple in their habits of life, and imbued with a deep-seated love of their holy religion.' The author(s) recounted that since the apparition Cavanagh had received more than ninety letters a day on the topics of both the apparition and the miracles reputed to have taken place. Other publications quickly took up this theme. The *Daily Telegraph* said: 'Archdeacon Cavanagh is reputed among all the countryside as a man of simple piety, gentle manners, and a modest and retiring disposition.'[15] Sexton also stressed Cavanagh's piety and stated his 'reputation for sanctity has spread far beyond the sphere of his ministrations.' Sexton used the simplicity of Cavanagh's living conditions to emphasise his nature. He said the priest's house had three rooms with a clay floor and 'No pastor in the land occupies a more modest dwelling. The low thatched roof, whitewashed walls, the few diminutive windows all might lead the passer-by to look on it as the home of a small farmer, save for the low wall in front, the neat little wooden gate, and the narrow strip of grass separating the dwelling from the road.' When he visited he found Cavanagh with two or three other clergymen and 'surrounded by a little crowd of men and women of his flock, almost every one of whom had evidence to give of bodily ailments lessened or altogether got rid of by visits to the church of the Apparition.'[16]

[15] MacPhilpin, *Apparitions at Knock,* pp 20 & 58.
[16] Sexton, *Illustrated Record of the Apparitions,* pp 14 & 15.

In outlining Cavanagh's devotion to the Blessed Virgin and to our Lady of Lourdes, however, Donnelly relies quite heavily on statements made to this effect in later years, including one by Cavanagh's former curate, Monsignor Patrick McAlpine, in 1898 and the writings of William Coyne. The problems with attaching credibility to such accounts of Cavanagh's piety after his association with the apparition are self-apparent. In addition to his devotion to the Blessed Virgin and St Aloysius, Coyne also claimed Cavanagh had a special interest in souls in purgatory. He claimed that at the time of the apparition Cavanagh had just finished saying 100 masses for souls in purgatory. Donnelly says 'this project was entirely consistent with other manifestations of Cavanagh's pious asceticism: his penances, his self-denials, and the hair shirt he wore "for the greater part of his life." Not surprisingly, at his death his parishioners "related the commonly accepted pious belief that the apparitions at Knock could be entirely attributed to the holiness of their pastor."'[17] Hynes posits that while Cavanagh's defenders claim he commenced these 100 masses because his parishioners did not have the means to pay for masses for intentions, it is possible that he was in fact being boycotted due to his opposition to the Land War.[18] This is an interesting proposition, but there is not even any certainty Cavanagh actually said these 100 masses. However, the story highlights the foregrounding of Cavanagh's piety in accounts of the apparition. Even his failure to attend the apparition became part of the narrative. He told Sexton:

> I console myself with the reflection that it was the will of God. It was the will of God that the vision should be shown to the people, not the priest. If I had seen it, and if I had been the first to speak of it, many things would have been

[17] Donnelly, 'Marian Shrine', pp 60 & 61.
[18] Hynes, *Knock,* p. 203.

> said that cannot now be advanced with any fair show of reason or probability on their side.[19]

This may well refer to the fact that he was still viewed with suspicion due to his opposition to the Land War. However, no contemporary accounts mention this.

That the apparition was connected to the Land War is another theme that first surfaced in the *Apparitions at Knock*. It tells the reader that 'a wonderful centre of religious excitement, and a great incentive to faith' has appeared in south Mayo and that the west of Ireland has also for the past twelve months 'been a trysting-place of all who have laboured for the improvement of the condition of the small farmers living on Irish soil.' After detailing how this agitation had engulfed the entire country, it describes how the fame of Knock had spread all over 'Europe and to America, just as the fame of Lourdes spread.' Later it says that the multitudes who flock to Knock from surrounding areas are 'quite as numerous as those that formed the monster meetings that for the past nine months have been held in the counties Mayo, Galway and Sligo.'[20] This work omits all mention of conflict between the clergy and the leaders of the movement. Instead, it joins the wellspring of religious devotion arising out of the apparition with the growth of the agitation.

The Tuam Diocesan Archive contains a potted history of Knock consisting of twenty-two typed pages and a map. It is undated, but is contained in a folder relating to the second commission. However, as the author stated that Knock had been a 'mecca of many pious pilgrims' for sixty-four years we can deduce that it was written in 1943. It highlights the positive change brought about by the establishment of a peasant proprietorship. The writer said that since the tenants of the Dillon estate

[19] Sexton, *Illustrated Record of the Apparitions,* p. 15.
[20] MacPhilpin, *Apparitions at Knock,* pp 6 & 7.

gained ownership of their land from the Congested District Board in 1900 the area, 'began to show signs of progress and prosperity. An air of ease and comfort became noticeable. Uninviting features of the country disappeared. Lakes were drained, rivers canalised and the congestion relieved.' With the benefit of hindsight the author stated, in a section called 'Heroes and Martyrs', that men of Knock were to the fore during 'the Fenian movement and the Land war.' He/she sets forth the exploits of Knock men during the 1798 rebellion, the Fenian campaign and the Land War in a positive light.[21]

In stories of Marian apparitions, Mary is generally portrayed as appearing to a poor and oppressed people. The Land War did not usher in Communism or secularism; in fact, by making occupiers the owners of their land it made a large section of the population property owners. It encouraged conservatism to the extent that in lamenting the failure of the 1916 rising Leon Trotsky stated that 'after the agrarian reforms of 1881-1903, the farmers turned into conservative small property owners, whose gaze the green banner of national independence is no longer able to tear away from their plots of land.'[22] As such the narrative of Knock could comfortably accommodate the Land War. The lack of a spoken message at Knock has allowed others to project meaning onto it retroactively. While Donnelly claims that Archbishop Lynch's letter established the association between the apparition and the Land War, as early as 1880 the *Apparitions at Knock* made the connection explicit. Whether or not the people in Knock were in immediate danger of eviction

[21] 'History of Knock Parish' (TDA, Gilmartin papers, B4/9-i/5). Pp 12 &18-9.
[22] Leon Trotsky, 'On the events in Dublin' (July, 1916) https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1916/07/dublin.htm [accessed 09/03/15].

or starvation, 'belief in the intercessory power of the Virgin offered hope to the individual; it also fed a collective faith in the apparitions.'[23]

The first reported cure at Knock was that of twelve-year-old Delia Gordon on 31 August, ten days after the apparition. The *Nation* reported on 6 March 1880 that she had been cured of deafness and pain in her left ear when a small piece of mortar from the gable was placed in it. This shows that mortar came to be regarded as a relic early on. Delia was daughter to P.J. Gordon, who had roundly condemned clerical attitudes to the Land War. Sexton met Delia and her parents on his second visit and stated, 'she is now the very picture of health and spirits.'[24] Her parents attested that she had suffered from a very bad pain in her ear and that when attending mass at Knock after the first apparition Delia had an attack of pain so bad she began to cry. Her mother brought her outside and used a pin to take some plaster from the gable, made the sign of the cross over it and placed it in her ear. Apparently the pain disappeared within a few minutes. From a letter written by Kate Gordon and reproduced by Hynes it seems that she may have started the tradition of using mortar from the chapel wall as a cure.[25]

It seems that the Blessed Virgin was ambivalent on the issue of the Land War when it came to dispensing cures. Writing his report on his visit on the Festival of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin, 2 February 1880, Sexton stated on that the previous Saturday 'Miss Burke (sic) of Curraleigh' sister of Walter Bourke and Major-Surgeon Burke of the Indian army had travelled from her residence to Knock.

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[23] Blackbourn, *Marpingen,* p. 21.
[24] Sexton, *Illustrated Record of the Apparitions,* p. 11.
[25] Eugene Hynes, 'The Priest and the Miraculous Cure at Knock of the Political Shoemaker's daughter: Religion and Agitation in the Early Land War in Mayo' in Gerard Moran and Nollaig O Muraile (eds). *Mayo: History and Society; Interdisciplinary Essays on an Irish County*, Geography Publications, Dublin, 2014 p. 473

He claimed that 'she had long been an invalid, and was helpless as an infant for some time past.' Archdeacon Cavanagh, her mother, her footman, and her maid assisted her from her carriage. She prayed at the altar awhile and 'then to the delight and amazement of all observers, got up and walked out of the church, and to her carriage, with no other assistance than that afforded to her by her mother's arm.'[26] Kate Gordon claimed to have seen Miss Bourke cured and bore no animosity to her and thanked God and the Blessed Virgin for her cure. According to Hynes, 'Kate Gordon could appreciate Miss Burke's (sic) faith while doubtless being critical of the behaviour of landlords like Walter Burke (sic) of Curraghleigh, just as Kate's husband P.J. could simultaneously support nuns who taught children in Claremorris and oppose priests who supported landlords or in electioneering for Parliament.' Sexton claimed to have seen her drive up to the chapel, enter and later leave, with only the assistance of her mother. Miss Bourke may have been declared cured, but she died soon afterward.[27] Although P.J. Gordon was later imprisoned for inciting people to murder Walter Bourke, the fact that both families attended at Knock and believed they obtained cures demonstrates that it led to some level of harmony, or at the very least provided a level of social cohesion that went beyond economic and social divisions. Bourke cannot have found this outcome disagreeable.

## Templates

Chapter VI of the *Apparitions at Knock* attempts to highlight its significance by explicitly comparing it with apparitions in other countries. In particular it

[26] Sexton, *Illustrated Record of the Apparitions,* p. 11.
[27] Hynes, 'Political Shoemaker', pp 473-6.

mentioned La Salette, Lourdes, and Marpingen, and claimed: 'In all these supernatural manifestations there are features which mark them with a special character.' The apparition of an angel or beatified soul was said to always be accompanied by light, the light appeared before the being and remained after it. The *Apparitions at Knock* claimed that these three features were apparent at Marpingen, Knock, and Lourdes, but in fact nobody saw the Knock apparition appear or disappear. Having outlined the precedent found in European countries the writer, almost certainly Bourke, went on to connect it to Irish and biblical precedents such as the life of the Irish saint Columkille who, 'like Abraham, walked continuously with angels.'[28] Other coincidences outlined were that the Blessed Virgin never appeared to the priest, usually preferring to meet ordinary people and she normally showed up on a Thursday and was gone by 10pm.

Marian devotion had grown in the nineteenth century and was expressed in a number of organisations. The Children of Mary Sodality exploded in popularity in Ireland in the 1860s, following the Lourdes apparition. Donnelly feels that the role of this sodality in encouraging piety and Marianism provided an important backdrop to Knock, as did the parish mission movement. He cites Larkin's contention that this movement was crucial to the making and consolidation of the devotional revolution and believes it 'had the particular effect of intensifying devotion to Mary.' Many parish missions had a strong Marian focus and encouraged people to join confraternities and sodalities, which likewise had a Marian focus. Many sodalities and confraternities, even those not specifically devoted to the Blessed Virgin, displayed enthusiasm for Marian phenomena and were amongst the earliest

[28] Ibid., pp 46-8.

organised pilgrims to Knock.[29] The growth of Knock as a pilgrimage site, therefore, happened against the backdrop of the devotional revolution in Ireland, the growth of Ultramontanism generally, the Marian century and the proclamation of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception and the Marian apparitions that had taken place elsewhere in Europe. Technology facilitated this growth as railroads, telegraph and print media spread word of apparitions and enabled mass pilgrimage. Far from representing an atavistic folk practice, the Knock apparition was essentially modern. It may have been a reaction against modernity, but it was a particularly modern reaction. Ruth Harris highlights the popularity of Lourdes as demonstrating its role in modernity. Stories of it were spread by telegram and print media and the opening of a railway line to it in 1866 enabled mass pilgrimage. The site became an important symbol of anti-republicanism and support for Pope in in his struggles with Italian Republicans was equated with support for the Bourbon monarchy in France in 1870-1.[30]

Bourke embraced Ultramontanism, seeing it as a triumph over the penal laws. While the papacy never gave approval to Knock, Bourke put a distinctly ultramontane slant on it. Apparitions did not undermine papal authority and 'the pontificate of Pius IX showed that the church could successfully channel powerful currents of popular piety; that it could take up the fears and aspirations unleashed by the apparitions of the Virgin and give them institutional shape.' In doing this the Church 'domesticated a potentially anarchic wave of popular sentiment.' Not only did the Church ensure that apparitions flowed in orthodox channels, 'they went well beyond that, assimilating elements of the new cult into the liturgy and pressing the

[29] Donnelly, 'Marian Shrine', pp 62-3 & 66.
[30] Harris, *Lourdes*, p. 16.

apparitions into the service of the "Marian century".' Blackbourn claims that the Marian apparitions were therefore part of the papacy's fight against the nineteenth century, as were the doctrine of papal infallibility in 1870 and the *Syllabus of Errors* in 1866. He claims the church proved 'remarkably adept at using modern means of communication to further the cult of the Virgin.'[31]

## Later Alleged Miracles and Cures and the Growth of Pilgrimage

The initial report on the apparition in the *Tuam News* detailed a subsequent apparition, on Monday 5 January, the eve of the epiphany, which continued into the following morning. It claimed that two policemen were among the witnesses and that one had not believed in the apparition until he saw it for himself. Bourke introduced one of these policemen to the reporter from the *Daily Telegraph* and he told how on that night, around midnight, he and a comrade were on patrol and when passing the chapel they heard people praying. They went down to investigate and someone called out: 'There's a light'. He stated that he and the other officer then saw a 'rosy sort of brightness.'[32] While saying that neither of them saw any figures, he claimed that some of the women present did.

The *Apparitions at Knock* contains a brief chapter on later alleged apparitions. Three young men from Claremorris called John P. MacCloskey, Simon Conway and Thomas MacGeoghegan allegedly saw an apparition early on the morning of 6 January, the feast of the epiphany. Adding further support to the contention that Ulick Bourke is the actual author of the *Apparitions at Knock*, it

[31] Blackbourn, *Marpingen*, pp 37-8.
[32] MacPhilpin, *Apparitions at Knock*, p. 57.

claims that the testimony of the three, including that of MacCloskey, which was reproduced, was given in the company of 'Joseph Bennett, Esq., Special Correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph.*' As Bennett was in Claremorris in Bourke's company, it is safe to assume that Bourke wrote this account. These men claimed to have seen a variety of lights and the Blessed Virgin in their midst at Knock chapel.[33] Sexton interviewed Miss Anderson, the teacher in the girls' school who, along with her assistant, Miss Kennedy, and a fifteen-year-old servant girl called Anne Mullea, claimed to have seen the apparition on the night of 5 January. She claimed that there were sixteen or eighteen people present, including the two policemen, Judy Campbell and 'Pat Byrne and his daughter and son.'[34]

The claims of so many people to have seen lights on this occasion suggests that many of those who claimed to have seen an apparition did see some sort of light. However, most, on this occasion, described no more than lights. It is probably these alleged apparitions that spurred the *Tuam News* to publish the first accounts of the initial apparition. That so many people were present shows that pilgrimage developed organically. One apparition not mentioned in the MacPhilpin book is Cavanagh's claim to have seen a vision that he recounted to Sexton. He said that between eleven and twelve o'clock in the day on 2 January 1880 he saw lights on the gable of the chapel and

> on the other side of it a pillar—pedestal, column, cap, and all parts, perfect. The pillar supported a figure. What the figure represented I was not able to distinguish. Other pillars, decreasing in size, stood along towards the centre

[33] Ibid., p. 52.
[34] Sexton, *Illustrated Record of the Apparitions,* p. 19.

of the gable. The smallest was next the centre. On the inner side of the gable wall I saw exquisite luminous scrolls extended.


**Early pilgrims at Knock (Knock Shrine Museum).**

On 13 February Cavanagh told Sexton that he had seen an apparition on the previous night. He claimed to have seen a brilliant star at the gable that 'lit up the whole place' and that he frequently saw a star in this place at 'about eight or nine at night.'[35] Other reported apparitions included that of Martin Hession of Tuam, who claimed to have seen the Blessed Virgin on the evening of Monday 9 February 1880. However, devotional writers have never given any credit to these subsequent apparitions. Michael Walsh argues that these visions were 'spiritual mimicry' and that 'not only is it possible that the devil may try to act as the "ape of God", but humans also, whether through malice or unconsciously through involuntary

[35] Ibid., p. 15.

deception, may try to reproduce the original apparition.'[36] Ironically, Walsh then claimed that these later apparitions were a hoax perpetrated with a magic lantern. Reports of further apparitions were not confined to Knock and, on 10 July 1880, the *Nation* reported on alleged apparitions at Newmarket on Fergus, Co. Clare.[37] For most devotees of Knock, the only apparition they consider credible is that of 21 August 1879 and for proof they look to the witness testimony.

While reports of cures were becoming common by the time of the publication of *The Apparitions at Knock,* it claimed that there had been reports of them since before Christmas. 'There one could behold the blind, the lame, the crippled, the deformed, the deaf, the paralytic - all seeking to be cured, like those whom the redeemer found at the Pool of Bethsaida, in Jerusalem.' The writer claimed that he heard from reliable eye witnesses of nearly a dozen cures.[38] Cavanagh uncritically recorded all reports of cures in a diary and received letters from those who claimed to have been cured.[39] According to Donnelly: 'From numerous entries in the diary and from other evidence it is clear that Cavanagh applied no very exacting tests to the claims of cures.' He therefore gained a reputation for gullibility. In the early 1880s, however, an effort was made to tighten up procedure by requiring a medical examination that produced a certificate if the cure was deemed valid.[40]

Pilgrims began to chip away at the mortar on the gable of the church for its supposedly medicinal qualities. On his first visit, Sexton said: 'At present the wall as high as the hand can reach is denuded of its coating of cement, and even the mortar

[36] Walsh, *The Apparition at Knock,* p. 110.
[37] *Nation*, 10 July 1880.
[38] MacPhilpin, *Apparitions at Knock,* pp 8 & 15.
[39] Cavanagh amassed a huge record of cures and they can be found in both the Knock Shrine Archive and Tuam Diocesan Archive. (KSA Cavanagh/Cusack Papers, 109 & 111); (TDA, Gilmartin papers, B4/9-i/2).
[40] Donnelly, 'Marian Shrine', p. 74.

from between the stones has been scraped out by visitors to the scene who wish to carry away with them some relics of that portion of the building.' He also described a number of walking sticks left behind and a table with two candles and statuettes. Painted on to this table were the words, 'It is important that any miraculous cures wrought here would be made known to the parish priest.' He described how when he was there, about twenty people were praying inside the church, about a dozen were at the apparition site and two or three 'bareheaded in the cold winter wind, were walking round the church, praying as they went, someone having told them that three "rounds" of this sort ought to be performed; and one poor cripple performing those penitential circuits, toiled his way painfully along on hands and knees.'[41]

The following week, when he returned, he found hoarding had been put in place to preserve the wall. On this issue he reported that

> Archdeacon Cavanagh told me of the eagerness of the people, who came in multitudes from far and near, to possess themselves of fragments of cement or mortar from the wall of the southern gable. When the cement that was near to hand had been entirely picked away, the mortar was rooted out from between the stones, then the stones themselves were detached, and in a few days a large hole appeared in the wall, A second hole was soon after made. The sheathing of planks had to be put up, or else the wall would have rapidly disappeared.

On his third visit, on 13 February, he recounted that the number of sticks and crutches had grown again.[42] Cavanagh told him of alleged cases where people had been cured or at least got some relief by applying water mixed with gable mortar to

[41] Sexton, *Illustrated Record of Apparitions,* pp 6-7.
[42] Ibid., pp 15 & 20.

an injured or painful body part or by drinking water collected in front of the gable. Every report by Sexton carried details of cures, usually recounted to him second-hand. Holes appeared in the chapel floor as pilgrims dug up the ground for relics and cures. Mortar was sent around the world and cures from it were reported from as far away as Montreal, while a priest in Newfoundland claimed that thirty to forty of his parishioners had been cured through the intercession of Our Lady of Knock.[43]

The *Apparitions at Knock* defined a miracle as 'an extraordinary work or operation opposed to the normal laws of nature, and performed either directly or indirectly by God', adding that the work had to be 'unusual.' In a typically Bourke-like turn of phrase the writer said: 'If a body be not burned in the fire, like the three companions of Daniel in the fiery furnace; and our blessed Lord walking on the waters of the sea of Genesareth – that is a miracle.' It also said that a cure brought about by a 'strong imagination' did not constitute a miracle. Indicating the possibility of more than one author, when dealing with the question of whether miracles had taken place, it said: 'We answer that in our opinion there have been many.'[44] It then listed cures from Cavanagh's diary and reproduced letters to him recounting alleged cures.

## Commercial Considerations

Blackbourn says that 'apparition sites were indeed generally poor, but they were hardly cut off from the world. How could they be in an era of state-building, furious diocesan organisation, and the encroaching market?' Many apparition sites,

[43] *Nation*, 1 May & 18 September 1880.
[44] MacPhilpin, *Apparitions at Knock,* pp 64-6.

Knock included, were on, or close to, railway and telegraph lines and 'If we interrogate the cliché of the remote apparition site, we find that they were not always so remote after all, but had been at least partially penetrated by the forces of change. Their problem was not that they were isolated but that they were marginal.'[45] Knock was marginal, a point emphasised in the *Apparitions at Knock*, and the general poverty of the land would have made any additional income more than welcome. While many of those who began to travel to Knock came from the surrounding area, as its fame spread travellers came from further away. The *Apparitions at Knock* spoke of how the Great North-Western Railway served the town and travellers could disembark at either Claremorris or Ballyhaunis and travel on from there. This led to a rivalry between the two towns, as there was a lucrative trade in serving as a staging post for travellers going to Knock. Hotels regularly reached capacity and horses and carriages were available at both train stations to take the pilgrims the remaining five or six miles to Knock.[46] Claremorris was also served by the railway from Athenry, Limerick and Cork.

As early as August 1880 newspapers reported on the brisk business of traders at Knock. Photographers also established an immense trade in images of Knock and J.J. Lalor, who advertised regularly in the *Nation*, sold a wide range of Knock merchandise including a Knock medal. Any locals sceptical of the apparition would have good reason to keep their doubts private. This was not a purely Irish phenomenon and at most apparition sites 'profit played an undoubted role in winning local support for the apparitions.' It would be crass to suggest that financial concerns underlay deliberate conspiracies to report apparitions, but there were without doubt

[45] Blackbourn, *Marpingen*, p. 363.
[46] MacPhilpin, *Apparitions at* Knock, pp 16-7.

many, including the Beirne family, who benefited from pilgrimage. In Lourdes, the family who owned the land on which the grotto stood became immensely wealthy and the town got a railway link that brought visitors and led to the development of hotels and commerce.[47]

When Sexton asked Cavanagh where visiting pilgrims stayed he said: 'Some of them manage to get food and lodging in one of the houses in the village, or at some little distance. But, as you can see for yourself, there are few houses here, and, as yet, no regular means of accommodation has been provided.' We can infer that many of the guests Sexton saw in the Beirne household paid their way. Speaking to the second commission both Patrick Beirne and John Curry recollected having pilgrims stay in their houses. Cavanagh stated that people looked for ground to build upon to provide accommodation, but that there was no intention of opening a public house. He was a strict teetotaller 'and quite averse, as you may guess, to any facilities being afforded for indulgence in intoxicating liquors.' Cavanagh told Sexton that not only was there no public house in Knock, but nobody intended to apply for a licence. Precautions had been taken to ensure that nothing intoxicating would be sold in the town.[48] This contrasts to Daniel Campbell's recollection, in which he told of two public houses, including that of Bryan Beirne, that operated on church land as well as numerous shebeens and regular drink fuelled altercations. In addition, as highlighted below, in 1883 and perhaps earlier, the Kelly residence had a tap room. It seems that those in need of a drink in Knock would have no problem finding one.

[47] Blackbourn, *Marpingen* p. 16.
[48] Sexton, *Illustrated Record of the Apparitions,* p. 27.

Bernie Byrne, grandson of Dominick Beirne, Sr (the spelling of the name has become standardised) told Fr Colm Kilcoyne for his recent book, *Knock…and still they come,* 'I do know my grandmother used to do bed and breakfast for the pilgrims. The kitchen floor would be covered with stretchers waiting to be brought up to the church.'[49] Byrne says his father opened a shop and two stalls that he passed on to his sons, indicating that for the locals of Knock pilgrimage has continued to bring income. Newspapers had incentive to report on Knock as it helped to increase sales and this in turn helped to bring in advertisers. The almost weekly reports on Knock in the *Nation* in 1880 featured on the same page advertisements for *The Illustrated Record of the Apparitions at Knock,* the Knock medal, and lithographs depicting the apparition. *The Illustrated Record of the Apparitions at Knock* also featured an advertisement at the end for a Knock miraculous medal while its back page carried advertisements for other books by the same publisher. Similarly, *The Apparitions at Knock* had advertisements on the back page for books by Bourke.

## The Nun of Kenmare

One of the more interesting characters drawn to Knock was Mary Frances Cusack, also known as Mother Mary Clare, the Nun of Kenmare. Like Bourke, Cusack was a cleric-cum-antiquarian who could be a divisive individual. Cusack visited Knock in 1881 and claimed to have received a miraculous cure there. The *Nation* reproduced a letter from Cavanagh to Cusack where he said it was his 'highest ambition and most ardent desire to see a convent established at Knock.' He told Cusack he believed that under her 'benign care the good work would prosper

[49] Kilcoyne, *Knock…and still they come,* p. 79.

and succeed.'[50] MacEvilly granted permission to Cusack to build a convent in Knock conditional on ample funds being raised before the foundation stone was laid. He also stated that 'in thus acceding to your pious request, it is by no means inferred that we sanction or approve of the alleged apparition or miracles said to have occurred at Knock. As at present we neither approve nor disprove of such. We reserve our judgement till the time comes, if ever, for canonically and judicially investigating the whole matter.'[51] To deal with all that followed this invitation would be a considerable digression from this thesis, but financial, organisational and personality problems led to her falling out with Cavanagh and leaving Knock in 1883. She did, however, find an ally in Bourke and he attempted to intervene on her behalf. Bourke wrote to the Vatican that he had become familiar with Cusack twenty years previously through her writings, but had only met her when she came to Knock. He claimed that he regarded her 'rather like somebody who has a special mission who was not bound by the ordinary rules that guide others.'[52] He described himself as her friend and said that he, Canon Waldron and Canon Peter Geraghty believed her works, like those of St Catherine or St Bridget, were guided by the love of God.

Bourke said that Cavanagh and his chaplain John Keaveny had complained to the archbishop that 'she used not to rise at 6 o'clock therefore used not to hear Mass: that she read newspapers and did not generally attend the rule.' Bourke felt this was excusable as she was not used to the climate and was 'like one of the higher planets or a brilliant comet'. He claimed that she and her novices had at first lived in stables and that she suffered badly from the cold. She therefore leased the country house of a

[50] *Nation*, 10 December 1881.
[51] Archbishop MacEvilly to Mother Mary Clare, 23 November 1881 (TDA, Gilmartin papers, B4/9-i/5)
[52] Transcript of Bourke letter to Vatican (recipient not specified), 25 January 1884 (KSA, Ferguson papers, 345).

gentleman farmer named Mr Kelly. However, the Kellys had a taproom on the property for selling alcohol, which they continued to operate. It was first operated by Mrs Kelly and was then by her two sons, who apparently smoked and behaved in an ungentlemanly manner. Bourke stated that Cusack had Mr Kelly arrested for coming to the house without coat or hat and 'peeping' in repeatedly. Another conflict arose when Cusack forbade Cavanagh's twenty-two-year-old niece, who used to associate with the younger Kellys, from spending time in the hothouse in front of the convent. According to Bourke: 'These people, small Lords in their way – could not understand the action of Rev. Mother. Now the Archdeacon and all his friends were opposed to her.'[53] They drew up a series of complaints and sent them to MacEvilly who sided with Cavanagh and his friends.

A ledger described as 'register of priests' was found in the former building of St Jarlath's' College, i.e. the Old College, in 1930. It is undated and its author is unknown, but it describes Bourke as 'a very uncertain & slippery man' and stated 'his compendium with Nun of Knock falsely accusing his Archbishop was scandalous & his defence more scandalous still.'[54] It seems Bourke picked the losing side in the debate around the Nun of Kenmare and it tarnished his reputation. Donnelly posits that the conflict surrounding the Nun of Kenmare, Cavanagh's credulity regarding cures and the proliferation of apparitions all combined to undermine the credibility of Knock and by the end of the 1880s it had all but vanished from public consciousness, although it did continue to have adherents. It would, however, undergo an extraordinary revival from the 1930s onwards.

[53] Ibid.
[54] Register of Priests (TDA, MacHale papers, B1/5-ix/1).

## The 1930s - The Second Commission and the Revival

In 1928 Rev. Edward A. D'Alton published his two volume work *The History of the Archdiocese of Tuam.* In volume one, he stated:

> It was said that the Blessed Virgin appeared at the end of the parish church in visible form. This was about 1878 and for many years crowds of pilgrims have come to Knock on the feast of Our Lady. Miracles, it is said, have been wrought, and undoubtedly a good deal of popular credence has been given to these reports. But a commission, appointed by Dr MacEvilly in 1882, after examining many witnesses, came to no definite conclusion, refusing to pronounce for the authenticity of the miraculous cures.[55]

That a historian of the diocese could not even get the years of the apparition and investigation correct speaks volumes. In volume two of his work he dedicated three paragraphs to the apparition and had a slightly less dismissive tone. However, eight years later D'Alton found himself on the second commission of investigation into Knock. The operation of the second commission followed a much more orthodox trajectory. The three surviving witnesses were interviewed, as were dozens of other people, some of whom had only the most tenuous connection to the apparition.

On 21 August 1929, for the fiftieth anniversary of the apparition, T.P. Gilmartin became the first archbishop of Tuam to officially acknowledge the event when he said mass at the apparition site.[56] Gilmartin appointed the second commission, but considerable credit for the revival of Knock must go to William and Judy Coyne. They wrote widely on the matter, established lay organisations for the

[55] D'Alton, *History of the Archdiocese of Tuam*, i, 225
[56] White, 'Popular Piety', p. 1.

promotion of Knock and campaigned to have it recognised by the Vatican. The fact that William Coyne was a judge not only lent credibility to his devotion to Knock, but meant he was highly connected. The Ireland of the 1930s was economically depressed and politically divided. The establishment of the Irish Free State had consolidated the advances of the Catholic Church in the nineteenth century and the new Catholic elite had established a legislature that not only offered concessions to the Church but feared to incur its wrath. The Knock apparition, although popular, had never commanded universal devotion. It was revived and the highly flawed findings of the first commission were used as proof that an apparition had occurred. The text of the apparition as shaped by Bourke became the script of the event and has remained so to the present day.

Crucially, the second commission used the *Apparitions at Knock* as the basis of its work and witnesses were asked: 'Do you confirm the deposition as it was published by John MacPhilpin of Tuam in the following year 1880?'[57] Mary Byrne, now Mary O'Connell, had married a farmer and still lived in Knock. She had recently turned 86 and had learned, when applying for her old age pension, that she had been 29 at the time of the apparition, not 26. In this testimony she stated that the first commission had interviewed her in the school, rather than the church. She reaffirmed the testimony from the *Apparitions at Knock* and clarified some points. She stated that there was an uncut meadow where the figures hovered, that they were not pressing down on the grass and 'we knew they were not statues.' She had changed her mind about the positioning of the hands on the Blessed Virgin and decided that rather than being raised they were down, an image similar to a

[57] Mary O'Connell, née Beirne, Patrick Beirne, and John Curry were each asked this question (TDA, Gilmartin papers, B4/9-i/5).

miraculous medal. She stated that 'when we went near the wall the figures seemed to go back to the wall as if they were painted on it. Then when we came back from the wall they seemed to stand out – and come forward.' O'Connell now claimed that she wasn't sure about St Joseph having grey hair, but said that he was not as white as the Blessed Virgin and anybody would have recognised him, and that she did not remember the book in St John's hand or the position of his other hand. She also stated: 'I don't remember about seeing the lamb but the others did. I didn't see the stars but the others did.' She claimed that the 'fifteen' witnesses never spoke a word to each other during the 'hour and a quarter' they were there and that they were themselves transfixed like statues.[58]

Apart from the differences mentioned, she said the testimony as read to her was accurate. She also stated that she had read the *Weekly News* report and that it was substantially accurate. She claimed that it was very close to what she told the reporter, but she could not swear to what was said about the cross. She said of the original depositions: 'I heard of them all being put in a book. I am sure I read them but I cannot remember now.' She claimed that people believed in the apparition and that 'they believed it happened because the Archdeacon was such a holy man.' She also said, contrary to other claims, that they did not say the rosary while there, but 'everyone was praying in their own way'. She stated 'I believed that the Blessed Virgin was there and I was praying to her. If I didn't I wouldn't have called the others.' As regards the pilgrimages that occurred after the apparition, she said: 'I thought there wasn't one in the world that didn't come.'[59]

[58] Mary O'Connell, née Beirne, testimony to second commission (TDA, Gilmartin papers, B4/9-i/5).
[59] Ibid.

Patrick Beirne was a farmer, now 72 years old. In his private notebook on the process, one of the interviewing priests, Fr Fergus Ryder, said he was a 'rather difficult character' who appeared 'cocksure' and 'seemed to feel that he was a person of some importance as having seen the apparition.'[60] Patrick Beirne agreed with his original deposition but contradicted the statement that he had remained only a few minutes and then gone away. He now claimed that he had arrived at nine o'clock and remained until twenty past ten. When asked if they had a watch or clock in his house he replied that they had both. He said his deposition had not been given under oath and that the three priests had held their inquiry 'in the old sacristy of the church, not this new sacristy.' He read an affidavit and agreed with it, except that the lamb was standing not leaning. He claimed that Mary McLoughlin may have been known to drink, but was not drunk that evening. Beirne claimed that he rubbed his hand over the figures and felt nothing but the surface of the wall, an account absent from his original testimony, and described the rain as a 'heavy drizzle.' He said he left with the people he arrived with; Dominick Beirne, Sr, John Curry, Patrick Hill and John Durkan, 'who had been working with Dominick Beirne that day.' He stated that he knew all of the other witnesses, had read their testimonies and that they were accurate and the people reliable. Beirne said he saw no apparition other than the one described and that he had heard of the one on the feast of the epiphany. In reference to pilgrimage, and in an indication of the importance of print reports in encouraging it, he said: 'They began to come here in 1880, day and night – hundreds.'[61]

John Curry, then resident in New York, was interviewed in 1937 by officials of the archdiocese of New York. He was now about 'sixty-three or sixty-four years

[60] Diary of Fr Fergus Ryder (TDA, Gilmartin papers, B4/9-i/8).
[61] Patrick Byrne testimony to second commission (TDA, Gilmartin papers, B4/9-i/5).

and formerly a labourer for the government.' He said that he now worked in a home for the aged run by the Little Sisters of the Poor and he also resided there. He couldn't remember when he had come to America for the first time, but came for the second time in April 1910. He had been aged twenty-three to twenty-five when he first arrived in America, but he had gone to England in 1899 following the Spanish-American War. He told the interviewers that before travelling to America for the first time he had lived with his grandparents about two to three hundred yards from the church at Knock. When asked why he lived with his grandparents, he said: 'They told me they took me when I was about a year old because there was a disease in the village.'[62]

Dominick Beirne, Sr was his uncle. Patrick Hill was his cousin, and was staying with them that night. John Durkan was a 'servant-man' who worked for Dominick Beirne. Dominick, Margaret and Mary Beirne were his cousins. He recollected seeing the three figures, the altar and the lamb. He claimed to have recognised the figures as 'I suppose I was brought up reading about them. I was going to school at the time.' He also stated that at the time he did not recognise St John but 'heard the others talking about it later that night.' However, when asked if he was attending school at the time of the apparition he was unsure, although he remembered being taken out of school for his interview with the commission. He also stated that 'Pat Hill told me what it was and explained it.' He told his interviewers that he did not see the figures move, but that there appeared to be two angels moving back and forth. He said he didn't know they were angels until Patrick Hill told him they were. Curry stated that there was no light around the church except that of the apparition and it 'seemed to come from the angels moving back

[62] John Curry testimony to second commission (TDA, Gilmartin papers, B4/9-i/5).

and forth.' He also said he heard people talking about 'who it was' they saw. Indicating the role again of the *Apparitions at Knock* he said, 'Just before I came into this hearing I was given a book and the only part of it I read was the statement by Patrick Hill and Catherine Murray.' He claimed that while he saw 'hundreds of people' visit Knock it was about a year afterwards that people began to visit.[63]

## Conclusion

When in 1938 Fr Corbett of Mallow wrote to the *Irish Times* about McLoughlin's drink problem and the initial clerical scepticism of the apparition, he claimed that he was motivated only by the good of religion. He made reference to an event in Tipperary during the War of Independence where statues were said to have bled by saying, as 'the hideous revelations about Templemore are still fresh in our memory, we should be extremely cautious in giving heed to such alleged apparitions.' Corbett stated that an alleged apparition had taken place in West Cork some years previous to Templemore and it was discovered to be the work of the son of the local publican using a magic lantern. He felt that by the clergy's silence on such 'chicanery' they would come to be associated with it and he criticised clergymen who participated in pilgrimages to Knock as it had not been endorsed by the church. He stated that he understood a lucrative trade was being done in pious objects at Knock and that he was 'giving expression to the thoughts of many priests and people in asking the question: whither does this tend?'[64]

[63] Ibid.
[64] C.W. Corbett to *Irish Times,* 23 July 1938 (TDA, Gilmartin papers, B4/9-i/9).

This letter provoked a response from William Coyne, which demonstrated that supporters of Knock brooked no criticism. He called the letter a 'sad collection of rambling inaccuracies, irrelevancies and inanities delivered in the worst taste.' He criticised Corbett for not referring to 'the mass of literature' on Knock or the crusade of prayer launched three years previously to help guide the ecclesiastical authorities on the matter. However, Coyne based his defence of Knock on the commission of investigation and its published testimony. 'This commission reported that the evidence of all the witnesses taken as a whole was trustworthy and satisfactory. Among the commissioners was the learned Rev. Ulick Canon Bourke.'[65] This testimony, in the form published by MacPhilpin, has become the canonical text of the Knock apparition reproduced by a myriad of devotional writers.

Coyne, strangely for a judge, gives an extraordinary interpretation of Fr Francis Lennon's report. He hones in on the fact that Lennon said a magic lantern could not have been used, but overlooks every other point Lennon raised that criticised the apparition. Ironically he then stated that 'Archdeacon Corbett expresses views of one who sets little value on facts', and describes the statement that one of the witnesses was under the influence of alcohol as 'a favourite sneer.'[66] However, in a strong indication that the Church authorities had shelved their ambivalence towards Knock in favour of enthusiasm, Corbett's archbishop, James Roche, wrote to Archbishop Gilmartin saying that Corbett spoke for 'himself and no one else' and that he was to receive a sharp rebuke and instructions not to write to the press on religious matters because he attacked the pilgrimages that Gilmartin approved of.[67]

[65] Coyne to *Irish Times,* 28 July 1938 (TDA, Gilmartin papers, B4/9-i/9).
[66] Ibid.
[67] Archbishop James Roche to Archbishop Gilmartin, 29 July 1938 (TDA, Gilmartin papers, B4/9-i/9).

In an even stronger endorsement of the pilgrimage, an addendum stated that a contingent from Cobh, accompanied by the archbishop's secretary, was to travel to Knock on the following Sunday. In the space of a decade – starting with D'Alton's one page on Knock in a two volume history of the Archdiocese of Tuam – Knock had managed to command almost compulsory devotion in the Irish church. However, the story of Knock as it re-emerged in the 1930s, was in fact the story as Bourke crafted it.

# Conclusion

Where does Knock fit into history? In the Ireland of the twenty-first century it is a place of little relevance to most people. In many ways, the papal visit of 1979 may have been its finest hour. Over a decade later an avalanche of scandals would undermine the Irish Catholic Church and the legalisation of divorce, homosexuality, and contraceptives commenced a process of secularisation that, while far from complete, has fundamentally altered Irish society. Knock still receives large numbers of pilgrims, but they are primarily elderly. A recent article by Attracta M. Brownlee details the importance of Knock to the traveller community, and conflict surrounding the dress of young traveller women, and is one of the few scholarly studies of contemporary social and religious practice at Knock.[1] Irish scholars have neglected contemporary Knock present as much as they have neglected its past. James S. Donnelly, Jr is Irish-American, Eugene Hynes is from Connaught but has lived in America for decades, and John J. White completed his PhD dissertation on Knock at Boston College. For many Irish people Knock is epitomised by Monsignor James Horan's successful bid to construct an airport nearby in the 1980s, as lampooned by Christy Moore's *Knock Song.* The airport, unaccountably, was a success. Knock seems to embarrass many Irish people, whereas in fact they should be intrigued. On a visit there in the run up to a referendum on a European Union treaty I was struck, not by the fact that there were people actively campaigning against the treaty, but by their reasons for doing so. At Knock the leaflet I was handed expressed worries

[1] Attracta M. Brownlee, 'Irish Travellers at Knock: Contesting Sacred Space', *New Hibernia Review*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (Summer, 2011), pp 126-35.

about the introduction of abortion and the perceived assault on Irish and Catholic values which would be carried out by the 'Godless' EU.

Who defines a nation? Who decides what is or is not Irish or how closely this corresponds to Catholicism? Ulick Bourke attempted to answer these questions. This thesis has shown that his view of the nation was all-encompassing. He argued for the ancient pedigree of the Irish nation and attempted to trace this from Noah's sons in the Old Testament, through antiquity in the form of Carthaginians, through the waves of settlement as outlined in Irish mythology, through to the Irish saints. He sought to express this pedigree in a form that corresponded to his own particular interpretation of linguistic science and scholarship. He saw the Irish language as the defining characteristic of Irishness, but more importantly as a vessel for Irish identity and history. He worked to save the language and, as this thesis has demonstrated, he had some success. The Irish language may not be regularly spoken by most Irish people today, but it is alive, and in the 1870s its extinction seemed the likely prospect. Bourke's belief in rigidly defined social structures manifested itself in his role in education at St Jarlath's, in his fawning attitudes towards elites and, crucially, in his intervention to keep the clergy at the head of the people during the Land War. The clergy may have come to be involved anyway, but Bourke deserves credit for taking the initiative, even if he had questionable motives. He wanted to ensure that the Land War remained an essentially conservative movement that did not behave contrary to Catholic teaching.

With such an all-encompassing view of nation and identity, it would have been strange if Bourke's views did not influence accounts of the apparition at Knock. His nationalism was most often expressed in print and, in essence, the story of Knock may represent his most successful text. The narrative of Knock, as shaped by

Bourke, was so in keeping with a Catholic, conservative, and Irish-Ireland view that, when the Irish Free State came into existence, Knock found an acceptance it had failed to achieve in the tumultuous nineteenth century.

# Appendix: 'Irish' versus 'Roman' letters.

An issue of real importance for those who strove to preserve and promote the Irish language in the nineteenth century was the form printed letters were to take. There were a number of schools of thought on how Irish should be written, but the debate centred on whether to use 'Irish' or 'Roman' letters. The 'Irish' letters were in fact a variant of an older Roman alphabet. With the advent of print this form of letters had been adapted to the new technology but merely reflected the level of calligraphy attained by early scribes rather than anything inherently 'Irish'. However, a tradition had developed and, as detailed by Dermot McGuinne in his book *Irish Type Design*, 'a respect for this tradition and…an inherent sense of aesthetic conservatism' led to this form of writing influencing both hand written Irish and type design.[1] In his early publications Ulick Bourke had used 'Irish' letters, claiming in the *College Irish Grammar* that 'the Irish language has been unmercifully mangled to make it look neat in its foreign anti-national dress', but by 1869 he had come to believe these letters were simply a derivation of the standard Roman alphabet.[2] Bourke had a font, which he named Romano-Keltic, made in London. It was similar in style to two earlier unpopular fonts, Neilson and Furlong. This font used the roman letters but retained the 'Keltic' dot (•) over certain consonants and Bourke used it in the *Keltic Educator, Tuam News, Aryan Origins* and all of his later works. The dot, known as an aspirate, or diacritical mark, indicated a change in the sound of consonants. This is now represented by adding the letter 'h' after the consonant in question. Bourke recognised that: 'It will be said that a (•) dot is a small point to establish a thesis on'

[1] Dermot McGuinne, *Irish Type Design: A History of Printing Types in the Irish Character* (Dublin, 1992) p. 2.
[2] Bourke, *College Irish Grammar,* p. 19.

but justified his strength of feeling by saying, 'the use or the non-use of it in the written Gaelic, like the white flag of the Bourbon Dynasty with the Count de Chambord, represents a principle.'[3] Some language enthusiasts were fiercely attached to the 'Irish' letters, as they felt that Irish could not be properly expressed in 'foreign' letters. In reality the only Irish letters are the marks found on ogham stones, and as these correspond to the Roman alphabet they cannot accurately be classed as an Irish alphabet.

Bourke explained his change of heart by saying:

> When I wrote the " College Irish Grammar" I was under the impression, from all I had then heard and known, that the form of letter called the " old Irish character'' belonged actually to the Irish race, as special to their written speech, just as Greek letters are special for the language of the Hellenic race. A wider range of reading and greater experience proved beyond all doubt that the ''old Irish character," as such, was old " Roman" the parent of the Anglo-Saxon, and the German, and like them borrowed from the Romans- The Irish and Latin manuscripts, still extant, point out this truth clearly.[4]

It was not until the 1960s that the modern 'Roman' letters became the standard for written Irish, although with the letter 'h' rather than the dot as the aspirate.

Bourke opposed the use of an 'Irish alphabet' by the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language and the difference of opinion on fonts came to represent the divide between revivalists and antiquarians.[5] The issue of the alphabet was one which pressed heavily on Comyn as he felt the decision made by the society would be seen as an endorsement of the form of letters they chose and determine the

[3] Bourke, *Aryan Origins*, p. 305.
[4] Bourke, *O'Gallagher's Sermons*, p. 388.
[5] Ibid., appendix.

future of the printed language.[6] There were a number of practical arguments in favour of the use of the modern letters, the most common of which was that that they were easier to read, especially for foreigners, and this was a feeling expressed by Scottish magazine, the *Highlander.* Despite Bourke's preference for modern letters, which had in turn influenced Comyn, the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language, Gaelic Union and Gaelic League all used the old letters. However, Comyn's editorship of the *Gaelic Journal* presented an interesting anomaly in that he left the decision on which letters to use up to the author, with the result that often both sets of letters were printed side by side.

[6] Comyn to Doyle, 14 April 1877 (NLI, Comyn papers, MS 8466(5)).

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